

### 1<sup>ST</sup> KINGS

#### Week 16, chapter 8 and 9

We will finally finish 1<sup>st</sup> Kings Chapter 8 today and we'll get started in chapter 9; however in some ways we are exiting it sooner than I would prefer to. Like a few other places in the Bible, this is one of those chapters where we could camp here for a long time and still not fully explore the depths of its contents.

We'll re-read verses 54 to the end of the chapter and discuss those passages shortly, but first I feel compelled to revisit verses 27 – 30 for a few minutes because within these passages we have one of the wisest men who ever lived utterly bewildered in trying to understand and express just who God is, the nature of His substance, how to describe Him, and how to explain in words and human thought this mysterious reality of God and His presence.

#### RE-READ 1<sup>ST</sup> KINGS 8:27 - 30

Solomon's frame of reference is that while the Temple is called Yehoveh's house (God's *beit* or *bayith* in Hebrew), and God's dwelling place, that in fact Solomon inherently knows that God does not actually live there, but rather He lives in Heaven. And yet.... the idea of God living in Heaven also isn't fully satisfactory to *Shlomo's* mind because if Heaven is a definable place it can't possibly be sufficient to house the limitless Creator.

Despite all this the Lord's presence at the Temple is undeniable because it was literally visible in a cloud that suddenly appeared INSIDE the *hekal*, the sanctuary; even more, Solomon understood that God didn't LEAVE Heaven to journey to the Temple in Jerusalem to visit His people Israel.

I bring this up because it addresses a challenge for the Church and Judaism that when dealt with poorly (as I regret that, in my estimation, it has been) often tends towards humanizing God. Making Him “more human” inevitably tars Him with some of our human flaws and characteristics, and places upon Him our human expectations as though He was the elected Prime Minister of Heaven and Earth and not the self-existent God of everything. In doing so we have come to feel freer to question God’s decisions and reckon that He must think logically and feel deeply as we do, only at an even greater level. In the end, the truth is that the more we try to describe God the more we diminish who He is.

The great Jewish Sage and Philosopher Maimonides who lived around 1200 A.D., known among the Jewish community as the Rambam, thought about this issue long and hard and no doubt Solomon’s prayer at the Temple dedication ceremony had much to do with his fascination of the problem of defining the God of Israel. Maimonides suggested one way to view this matter as what he called “negative theology”. And the idea is that God’s attributes expressed in the negative are His true attributes. In other words, at the same time that we can say that God is just we must also say that God is not unjust. While we can say that God is wise, we must also say that God is not unwise. That may sound like so much double-talk until we grasp that what Maimonides is saying is that unlike humans, the foundational traits of God have no opposites in Him.

If you will remember back to Genesis (in chapter 6), we had a lesson that included what I call the Principle of Opposites that is a fundamental and immutable trait of our Universe. It says that God created our Universe based on a foundational law that everything in and of our Universe will have an opposite. If there is an up, there is a down. If there is a near there is a far. If there is light there is darkness. If there is a male there is a female. If there is good there is evil. If there is birth there is death. On and on and on. The Rambam tells us that while we can define God best by means of expressing His attributes in the negative we cannot do the same with humans. For instance, while we can say with assurance that God is knowing and must also say that God is **not** unknowing we cannot say the same regarding any human trait about any human. That is while I can say that humans are knowing I **cannot** say that humans are not unknowing for in fact humans can be both knowing and unknowing depending on the individual and on the circumstance.

In other words, God is such a wholly other being than humans that while humans are essentially a fleshly container of opposites, God is not. A human being’s fundamental nature is as a creature composed of opposites. A human can exist, and then not exist. A human can be powerful and then become weak. A human can be good and then be bad. A human can be here, and then be there. A human can be wise and then be foolish. But none of this is true of

God and this is because He is not a container of opposites: He is what He is (or as He said in the Burning Bush to Moses, I am what I am) and therefore He is not a man that He should change. God has no capacity NOT to exist. God is unable to be weak. God is incapable of being foolish. God is not here or there; He hovered over the deep at Creation, ruled over His angels in Heaven, and was present at the outer edges of the Universe for the birth of every star all at the same time not because He chose to be, but because that *is* His fundamental nature.

Therefore Maimonides writes that we cannot know anything about God *per se*; God's essential character is completely incomprehensible to mortal minds. Human beings at best can only describe *what God does* in the world but will never be able to discern *what God is*. *And yet that is precisely what the Church has insisted upon doing for centuries, and it is why the Doctrine of the Trinity was invented. It's not that there isn't some amount of truth contained within the Trinitarian concept it's that we have taken something out of its biblical context and now confidently use it to make ourselves think that we know what God is, when we do not. We are not satisfied with only observing what God does, or experiencing Him personally; rather we feel compelled and perfectly able to do the very thing we should not do, because our essential nature doesn't have the ability for it: and that is to define and understand what God is.*

*This is the reason that I teach you to stop asking "why" when you contemplate the Lord or study God's Word, and instead ask "what". And the "what" concerns discerning "what" God-pattern or which biblically stated God-principle is at work in any given situation. Asking "why" is a good and reasonable question for trying to discover how our physical temporal Universe of time and space operates; but it is wholly wrong and self-defeating to try and discern God and His Holy Scriptures by employing "why" as a method of discovery. Because "why" implies that we can uncover and comprehend the nature of God's mind that underlies the "what". Asking "why" makes us think that we have the **right** to examine and debate God's reasoning for His establishment of His principles, laws, and commandments. But the Holy Scriptures teach us that the **duty** of God's people is only to **obey** His principles, laws, and commandments and to do so in a spirit of trust.*

The Rambam argues that it is inappropriate to employ even all the attributes ascribed to God in the Bible; we may use them in the biblical context when we come across them in the Scriptures, but it is unbecoming and even perhaps sinful to speak of God as possessing human-like characteristics. We should not remove a descriptive word from its context and then employ it as a means to define what God is, the most common of which in our age is to say, "God is love". Human language always falls short whenever speaking of God. Words become devalued and cannot hope to contain the cosmic mystery of God's Being and Presence. Human language falters and is utterly impotent although we are often certain that we've finally captured God's essence in those fine words. If words have difficulty describing the beauty of a

sunset, or a classic work of art like Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel, how much more so will words be clumsy and ineffectual in describing the reality of God.

Contained within the wisdom that God gave to King Solomon, came **Shlomo's** stunning admission at the Temple dedication ceremony that it is utterly futile to try and understand such things as God's omnipresence; that Yehoveh could dwell here and there and everywhere simultaneously and yet in the earthly human sense of dwelling, not reside anyplace at all but merely place his "Name" there. So in the end, all Solomon asked for is that no matter where God's people might be, that if they direct their prayers towards God's designated earthly place of meeting (the Temple on Mt. Moriah) that God will hear and act on those prayers in His will. The mystery of God was not challenged or solved but rather accepted. That is the true Scriptural definition of faith.

Let's re-read the remainder of 1<sup>st</sup> Kings 8 starting at verse 54.

### **RE-READ 1<sup>ST</sup> KINGS 8:54 – end**

Solomon had been in a kneeling position before God, hands outstretched, as he offered his prayers. But now he stood to address and bless the congregation of Israel. For reasons the Sages have debated for centuries, an important happening was left out in this narrative in 1<sup>st</sup> Kings that we find recorded in 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles.

**CJB 2 Chronicles 7:1 *When Shlomo had finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices.....***

I began the day asking you to put away your desire to know "why", as in "why" did God light the altar fire and burn up these offerings rather than just allowing the fire to be lit by the priests as usual? Instead our question should always be "what"; what God-pattern or principle is being employed here? And we find that answer in the Book of Leviticus, at the consecration of the Wilderness Tabernacle.

### Leviticus 9:22-24 CJB

***<sup>22</sup> Aharon raised his hands toward the people, blessed them and came down from offering the sin offering, the burnt offering and the peace offerings.***

***<sup>23</sup> Moshe and Aharon entered the tent of meeting, came out and blessed the people. Then the glory of ADONAI appeared to all the people!***

***<sup>24</sup> Fire came forth from the presence of ADONAI, consuming the burnt offering and the fat on the altar. When all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces.***

So the unchanging God of course consecrated Solomon's Temple of stone and wood in Jerusalem in the same way He did the portable one made of fabric, animal skins, and wood at the foot of Mt. Sinai. In repeating this pattern the people knew that the Lord pronounced that this place, this house, was acceptable and now it had been holy-fied.

In fact in verse 56 King **Shlomo** invokes Moses' name and reminds the people that what is happening here is all part of the covenant that Yehoveh had made with Moses 500 years earlier. "May Yehoveh be with us as He was with our ancestors", Solomon continues. How, exactly, was Yehoveh "with" their ancestors? Solomon never addresses that because it is impossible to put to words. Suffice it to say that God was with Israel because He said He would be, and Israel's many victories over their enemies and the fact that they are now at rest in the Land of Canaan, participating in this dedication celebration of a Temple to Yehoveh, is experiential proof of God's promise of His mysterious presence being with them.

But there was another strong implication in the statement about God's presence with Israel that the Rabbis have noticed. It is that it was important for the people to understand that now that the Temple was completed and consecrated, and that all of the Lord's promises made to

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob about arriving and settling in Canaan had been met, that God would not leave them to themselves. So Solomon prayed aloud in front of the people that God would not abandon them because He had not abandoned the Patriarchs.

And then finally another strong statement is made in verse 60 and we see that the concept of there being only 1 God over all the earth and over all mankind has begun to take root in Israel's leadership in a much more overt way than ever before. Solomon says that Israel needs to obey God, and God will in turn bless Israel, and in this way all the people of the earth will know that Yehoveh is God and there is none else. Two things: we have learned that a god's name was everything to ancient people. Knowing a god's name was the key to knowing what that god's attributes were, what functions of nature he or she was in charge of, and where that god's territory was. Yehoveh was to be associated not to a territory but to the entire earth. Why? Because He is the only god in existence. Second is how important this concept is to us today. We live in a world whereby many Christian denominations and those secular groups who want all of the world's religions to get along, have adopted the belief that assuming there is only one god, then it's OK to use whatever name your religion might call Him, from Allah to Buddha. Solomon didn't say, OK Canaanites, just know that Ba'al is actually Yehoveh. OK Moabites just apply everything you ascribe to your god Molech to Yehoveh since Yehoveh is the only god and you are actually worshipping Him. The idea was not that Yehoveh was some kind of universal melting pot of any and all characteristics of the gods that men could apply as they wished as long as they called God Yehoveh. Rather it was that the Holy Scriptures of the Hebrews are the source of defining God's attributes, and of expressing His deeds and principles and commands to humans, and His name is YHWH. There is no other God and therefore there is no other name for God.

The king now leads the nation in more offerings and sacrifices to the tune of 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep. Several classifications of offerings are listed: the chief of all offerings, the '**Olah**; the offering that always accompanies the '**Olah**, which is the **Minchah**; and also the **Zevah Shelamim** offering.

All the meat from the '**Olah** is burned up on the altar; none can be used for anything else. The **Minchah** is an offering of produce, and some of it is burned up and the rest goes to the priests. The **Zevah Shelamim** has a small amount of the animal burned up and the rest goes to the worshippers and the priests for food. The part of the **Shelamim** that is burned up is the **Helev**, which is the best fat that surrounds the organs. Generally speaking, all the meat of the **Shelamim** offering is used for food for the worshipper and for the priests. Thus we see that because thousands upon thousands of people came for this dedication and they would be there for 2 full weeks, food was needed. So in a very practical solution, while some of the animals were completely devoted to God and thus entirely burned up to ashes (the '**Olah** offering), the far larger portion of the sacrificial animals were sanctified and then used for food

for the enormous crowd (the **Shelamim** offering).

However the sheer quantity of animals that had to be processed and offered in whole or in part on the altar meant that it was physically impossible for the Great Altar of Burnt Offering to handle it all. Thus another means of accepting these sacrifices had to be arranged and that's what is being discussed in verse 64. There is much disagreement over the meaning of this passage. Some say that the King literally sanctified the courtyard and then a wood fire was built upon the floor of the courtyard and the animals burned up there. Others say that another altar was built and thus two altars were in use. In fact some of the Sages say that what was being used at first for the main altar was the original bronze altar of Moses from the days of the Wilderness Tabernacle; but now Solomon had an excuse to build a second, much larger altar, and this larger altar is what was in the courtyard. But after the dedication ceremony, Solomon's new and larger one would be used to replace the more ancient and smaller one. Your guess as to which of these suggestions is accurate is as good as mine.

The final two verses actually give us information that we discussed in the first teaching I gave to you about this chapter. Verse 65 begins: "So **Shlomo** celebrated the festival at that time". The word translated to festival is in Hebrew **chag**. A **chag** is a pilgrimage festival that requires all the adult males of Israel to travel from wherever they might reside, to the Temple in Jerusalem. This dedication ceremony is not a **chag** therefore this "festival" is something else, and in this case it is referring to one of the three God-established Biblical Feasts in the Torah Law, among which are **Matza, Shavuot, and Sukkot**. Let me remind you that it is common in the New Testament and in modern Jewish conversation to call the first of these pilgrimage festivals **Pesach** (Passover) instead of **Matza** (Unleavened Bread); however that is technically not correct.

**Pesach, Matza, and Bikkurim** is a series of springtime feasts that occurs in rapid fire succession: Passover first, the next day is Unleavened Bread, and the day after that is Firstfruits. Passover is a one day feast; Unleavened Bread is a 7 day feast, and Firstfruits is a 1 day feast. It is the Feast of Unleavened Bread that is the **chag**, the Pilgrimage festival, not Passover or Firstfruits. However, a pilgrim coming to Jerusalem for the festival of **Matza** (which for most involved an arduous journey) naturally wanted to come one day early so that he could have his Passover lamb slaughtered by a priest, cooked in an oven in the holy city, and celebrate with his brethren coming from all over the Holy Lands (although none of this was required).

Thus we get next this cryptic comment that the gathering came and celebrated before God (meaning at the Temple) for 7 days, and then for 7 more days, 14 in all. And then on the 8<sup>th</sup>



day the people dispersed and went home. The first 7 days was the Temple dedication ceremony; we know that 2<sup>nd</sup> 7 days (which was the **chag**) was **Sukkot** because there was an 8<sup>th</sup> day spoken of before they could leave, and that is the Torah ordained protocol for **Sukkot**. So the throngs of people remained in Jerusalem for 15 days total; that must have been something to behold. No doubt they camped out for miles around the city.

Let's get a bit of a start on chapter 9.

### READ 1<sup>ST</sup> KINGS 9 all

The events of the opening verses took place at least 13 years after the Temple dedication ceremony of chapter 8, because we're told in chapter 7 that it took Solomon 13 years to build his palace, and he didn't start counting that time until the Temple was completed. And in like manner (meaning in a dream) God visited **Shlomo** as He had near the beginning of the King's reign at Gibeon. No doubt Solomon was in his palace when this visitation occurred; the Tabernacle and priesthood were no longer located in Gibeon so there would be no reason for Solomon to be there.

In many ways this visitation from Yehoveh is connected with the 1<sup>st</sup> one. In the first visit God had asked **Shlomo** what he wanted from Him and Solomon asked for wisdom to rule his people. God was pleased with this request and so granted it but as a bonus gave to **Shlomo** that which he did NOT ask for: great wealth. Thus in verse 1 of chapter 9 we're told that after Solomon had not only built the beautifully appropriate Temple, but also a magnificent palace that was such a wonder that other potentates came just to see it, that Solomon had built everything else that his heart had desired. The Sages point out that while the Temple and the Palace were important and necessary, by saying "everything else that his heart desired" means that **Shlomo** built these other projects merely to please himself and gain fame. So God came the 2<sup>nd</sup> time AFTER the realization of Solomon's great wealth, and in response to Solomon's prayerful petition at the Temple dedication ceremony.

Notice again: it was at least 13 years AFTER the Temple dedication ceremony complete with Solomon's famous prayer that God came to tell Solomon that He would grant those petitions. One has to wonder if the King even remembered much about what he had asked of God so many years earlier. This was an awfully long time of waiting to find out.



Verse 3 is a bit odd on the surface; Yehoveh says that He has consecrated the Temple and placed His name there. Why would Solomon need to have this repeated 13 or so years later? We are not told and I don't want to get into a guessing game; however likely after all these years many trials had come and gone for Solomon and the Lord saw the need to reaffirm His commitment to the Temple as a holy meeting place. And I also think that after all these years of priestly rituals and ceremonies that perhaps Solomon needed to be gently reminded that it was Yehoveh who consecrated the Temple, not Solomon and not the priests.

In verses 4 through 9 the Lord conditions His blessing upon Israel and upon Solomon with obedience to the Torah, and finally threatens Israel with the terrible consequence of exile and of the Temple being abandoned by Yehoveh and becoming an eyesore and a monument to Israel's rebellion and apostasy. If I were to give a sub-title to this short section I would call it: "Behavior Matters".

There are 4 "ifs" presented to Solomon in this dream-visitation from Yehoveh. That is these are the 4 conditions for God's continued kindness and blessing over Israel, and since this is concerning how Yehoveh deals with Israel as a nation (as opposed to individual by individual), then as we have seen it developed in God's Word, the national condition (from God's perspective) is reflected in the national leadership. In this case because Israel is a monarchy, the national leadership is the king: King Solomon.

And the 4 "ifs" are these:

1. If Solomon lives in Yehoveh's presence. This means being submissive to God and following in His ways.
2. If Solomon displays pureness of heart and uprightness. This means integrity and morality based on God's definition of these traits.
3. If Solomon DOES what God commands. The idea is that Solomon doesn't passively pay lip service to the Torah, or merely say all the right things; it means to actually perform the deeds and works that the Father instructs.
4. If Solomon keeps the statutes, ordinances, and commands of God. This is speaking of the written laws and regulations as they are presented in the Torah. The Hebrew terms are ***choq, mishpat, and mitzvot***. And the idea is that together these form all the rules of ritual purity, all the do's and don'ts that define morality, the civil laws that define social justice and the procedures for bringing about God's justice faithfully.

If Solomon is faithful in all these things THEN the Lord will insure that a king will sit on Israel's throne that comes through Solomon's line. Let's stop and remember here that David had many sons through many wives and concubines. Thus a number of family branches of David are now in existence. Much like Yehoveh selected Aaron from the line of Levi to be the High Priest, and then from among Aaron's son's the Father ordained Eleazar to be the line from which further High Priests would come, so it is for Solomon. But for Solomon's line to continue to supply Israel's king (and not some other descendant of David's) then Solomon has to keep those 4 conditions.

We'll continue with chapter 9 next time.