

Solomon Dedicates the Temple

Alana sat on her large, screened-in back porch. Around her were the remains of a belated Labor Day party for her sister. Various bowls of chips, dips, and assorted snacks lay around on flat surfaces, with red plastic cups crowded around them. The two trash cans were overflowing with paper plates, and streamers and a few popped balloons were strewn across the floor.

It was 5 a.m., and she was sipping her coffee and sitting quietly before her family rose. It gave her a chance to reflect on the night before.

What had gotten into her? Why had she embellished so? Well—lied really. Alana had found herself put on the spot. Alana had joined a conversation where people were reminiscing of adventures during college days. Truth is, Alana hadn't any real adventures during her college years, at least not the kind that were being shared. So to fit in, she made up some. She was a writer after all, a good one. Good thing, though, that her husband wasn't around to hear her. Shaun would have said, "I've never heard this story before!" Still, she thought, it may get back to him.

What had she done? She had lied. She had sinned. All because she wanted to look exciting in the eyes of others.

"Lord, please forgive me," Alana prayed. "Recreate in me a clean heart and renew a right spirit within me. And help me with this mess."

1. *Do you have trouble accepting God's forgiveness? Why or why not?*

2. *How easy is it for you to forgive others when they wrong you?*

3. *Why is it sometimes easier to forgive strangers or acquaintances than family members?*

God Keeps His Promises

1 Kings 8:22–24 KJV

22 And Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in the presence of all the congregation of Israel, and spread forth his hands toward heaven:

23 And he said, LORD God of Israel, there is no God like thee, in heaven above, or on earth beneath, who keepest covenant and mercy with thy servants that walk before thee with all their heart:

24 Who hast kept with thy servant David my father that thou promisedst him: thou spakest also with thy mouth, and hast fulfilled it with thine hand, as it is this day.

1 Kings 8:22–24 NIV

²²Then Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in front of the whole assembly of Israel, spread out his hands toward heaven ²³and said:

“LORD, the God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven above or on earth below—you who keep your covenant of love with your servants who continue wholeheartedly in your way. ²⁴You have kept your promise to your servant David my father; with your mouth you have promised and with your hand you have fulfilled it—as it is today.”

The setting is Solomon’s dedication of the newly-built temple devoted to the Lord God. Solomon gathered all Israel for a feast, and the priests brought the ark of the covenant into the most holy place (1 Kings 8:1–9). The glory of God’s presence filled the temple like a cloud (vv. 10–11); and Solomon lifted his heart, hands, and voice to the Lord in prayer and supplication while standing before the altar (v. 22). He acknowledged the uniqueness of our awesome God. There is none like Him in heaven or on earth.

Solomon continues his prayer by recognizing God’s faithfulness in keeping His promises to His people. The “promise” (v. 24) to which Solomon refers is what God told King David concerning the temple. Even though David wanted to build a house for the Lord, God forbade it. Instead, God promised that David’s son would build it.

We know that God is faithful to keep all His promises.

Because of who He is—His faithfulness to His promises and willingness to hear and answer prayer—His people have every reason to come to Him. Like Solomon, we can worship the Lord and thank Him for what He has done. When we bring our supplications to Him, we know that He will answer and provide what is best.

4. *Where is Solomon when he begins this prayer of dedication?*

5. *What does Solomon first acknowledge about the Lord?*

6. *To what specific promise of God does Solomon refer (v. 24)?*

God Knows Our Hearts

1 Kings 8:37–39 KJV

37 If there be in the land famine, if there be pestilence, blasting, mildew, locust, or if there be caterpillar; if their enemy besiege them in the land of their cities; whatsoever plague, whatsoever sickness there be;

38 What prayer and supplication soever be made by any man, or by all thy people Israel, which shall know every man the plague of his own heart, and spread forth his hands toward this house:

39 Then hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place, and forgive, and do, and give to every man according to his ways, whose heart thou knowest; (for thou, even thou only, knowest the hearts of all the children of men;)

1 Kings 8:37–39 NIV

³⁷“When famine or plague comes to the land, or blight or mildew, locusts or grasshoppers, or when an enemy besieges them in any of their cities, whatever disaster or disease may come, ³⁸and when a prayer or plea is made by anyone among your people Israel—being aware of the afflictions of their own hearts, and spreading out their hands toward this temple— ³⁹then hear from heaven, your dwelling place. Forgive and act; deal with everyone according to all they do, since you know their hearts (for you alone know every human heart).”

This part of Solomon's prayer concerns God's warning, given centuries earlier. After wandering in the wilderness, Moses brought the people to the edge of the promised land. He challenged them to be faithful to the Lord and to stay away from false gods. Faithfulness to their God and His commands would bring blessing (Deut. 28:1–14). Unfaithfulness would bring curses and plagues: famine, swarms of crop-devouring locusts, defeat and oppression by cruel enemies (Deut. 28:15–44). Solomon foresees that God's people will face these consequences (1 Kings 8:37). Although sin's consequences are harsh, they are meant to prompt the people of God to repent and to be restored.

Thankfully, we can ask God to forgive us and receive us back to Himself. God knows our hearts, and He will never turn away a repentant sinner.

7. *What kinds of calamities would bring famine to the land?*

8. *What makes an effective prayer of confession and repentance?*

9. *How will God respond to a sinner's contrition of heart?*

God Forgives Our Sins

1 Kings 8:46, 48-50a KJV

46 If they sin against thee, (for there is no man that sinneth not,) and thou be angry with them, and deliver them to the enemy, so that they carry them away captives unto the land of the enemy, far or near;

48 And so return unto thee with all their heart, and with all their soul, in the land of their enemies, which led them

1 Kings 8:46, 48-50a NIV

⁴⁶When they sin against you—for there is no one who does not sin—and you become angry with them and give them over to their enemies, who take them captive to their own lands, far away or near. . . . ⁴⁸and if they turn back to you with all their heart and soul in the land of their enemies who

away captive, and pray unto thee toward their land, which thou gavest unto their fathers, the city which thou hast chosen, and the house which I have built for thy name:

49 Then hear thou their prayer and their supplication in heaven thy dwelling place, and maintain their cause,

50a And forgive thy people that have sinned against thee.

took them captive, and pray to you toward the land you gave their ancestors, toward the city you have chosen and the temple I have built for your Name; ⁴⁹then from heaven, your dwelling place, hear their prayer and their plea, and uphold their cause. ^{50a}And forgive your people, who have sinned against you."

Our God is gracious and long-suffering, but also fair. He will deal with sin. Many people deny being a sinner; but His Word says, "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8). Denying sin will bring us no closer to restoration with God.

God promised that, should His people turn to other gods, He would give them over to their enemies. If God's people serve the gods of other nations, those foreign nations with their idols would become oppressors. Apart from God, sin consumes people; and sin has consequences.

But as Solomon's prayer indicates, people in the chains of bondage to sin do not have to stay there. We can cry out to our gracious God, and He will hear us. God's people would be heard when they cried out from the temple of Jerusalem. And because God's presence now dwells in us who have faith in Jesus, we can cry out to God from any place. God will hear the repentant person's faith-filled prayer, and God sets that person free from slavery to sin.

10. *What does Solomon observe about people and their inclination to sin?*

11. *When God's people sin, what does He do about it?*

12. *What is the only hope for those taken captive by the enemy of sin?*

Seventy Times Seven

Forgiveness is a crucial element of the Christian walk. Without it, none of us would be saved. Sin is detestable in God's sight, and the only appropriate punishment is death. No matter what sin we've committed or how "bad" it is compared to someone else's, we deserve to be sentenced to death row, if not for God's forgiveness and plan of salvation.

Too often, we downplay the reach of sin in our lives and think of ourselves as decent human beings. When you take into consideration all the murderers and rapists in prison, surely a little jealousy or a "white lie" isn't that bad, right? Wrong! This is dangerous thinking, for we start to operate out of a place of pride, rather than humility. Without Jesus in your life, who's to say that you wouldn't become one of those same criminals you just condemned? Anyone who has accepted Christ as their Lord is a recipient of incredible grace. We are to be ambassadors of God's forgiveness, telling the world what God has done for us.

In no way does this make it simple to forgive others, but it sets the standard. This week I heard a preacher say, "You can't be a recipient of mercy, yet demand justice for those who've wronged you." Many of us have endured heart-wrenching situations that weren't fair, that no one should have to experience. It's okay to acknowledge your feelings of hurt, despair, or injustice. Leave them at the feet of Jesus and move forward in forgiveness. If you don't, that unforgiveness will grow into bitterness and resentment and harm you and your relationship with God.

13. *What is the difference between forgiveness and reconciliation?*

14. *Is it possible to forgive someone who isn't sorry? Why or why not?*

15. *What is something you need to confess to the Lord and repent of today?*

Forgiveness Over Justice

Forgiveness is hard. You may be thinking, *You don't know what so-and-so did to me; that person does not deserve forgiveness!* True, but you don't deserve forgiveness either. None of us do. That's the whole point of grace—getting the opposite of what we deserve. We receive a blessing when we deserve a curse, abundant life instead of death.

► *How have you experienced great forgiveness in your life—whether by God or someone you know? Who is someone that you need to extend the same forgiveness toward?*

KEY VERSES

What prayer and supplication soever be made by any man, or by all thy people Israel, which shall know every man the plague of his own heart, and spread forth his hands toward this house: Then hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place.

—1 Kings 8:38–39a KJV

And when a prayer or plea is made by anyone among your people Israel—being aware of the afflictions of their own hearts, and spreading out their hands toward this temple— then hear from heaven, your dwelling place. —1 Kings 8:38–39a NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of September 9 through September 15

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** Romans 8:29-39—We Are More than Conquerors through Christ.
- Tue.** 2 Corinthians 4:8-18—Do Not Lose Heart.
- Wed.** Psalm 69:1-15—God Protects Me.
- Thu.** Psalm 69:16-21, 29-36—The Lord Hears the Needy.
- Fri.** 2 Thessalonians 3:1-5—God Will Strengthen and Guard You.
- Sat.** 2 Kings 19:14-19—A Humble Prayer for Help.
- Sun.** 2 Kings 19:20-31—God Is a Powerful Defender.