

1 Chronicles 6 and 7: The House of Prayer

Solomon's reign (about 970-931 BC) was the kingdom of Israel at its peak, extensive, united, prosperous, powerful. These chapters describe a particularly high point, the dedication of a magnificent Temple to the Lord their God in Jerusalem.

The King led the people in reverent prayer, something of God's awesome glory was manifested and Solomon was given beautiful promises that this 'house of prayer' would be a place of grace and blessing for humble worshippers.

Situated in the nation's capitol, the Temple symbolised God's presence among His people. This was 'God's house' among theirs. While its builders knew the Almighty could never be adequately contained in a human construction, the Lord revealed Himself pleased to have His *name* dwell there.

Principles first introduced during the Exodus were being reaffirmed, principles for approaching God in worship - prayer, praise and offering. Sin was to be confessed and atoned for, life for life, by the shedding of sacrificial blood. At the centre of the complex the 'Most Holy Place' remained hidden behind a heavy curtain.

Centuries later this curtain would be supernaturally torn from top to bottom at the moment of Jesus' death on Calvary! The symbolism is powerful. The all-sufficient sacrifice was that day completed. The way to God has been opened and flawed people like us are invited to approach God in prayer. Jesus graciously encourages us to do so in the authority of *His name*.

Solomon was no stranger to God's grace, His undeserved mercy and favour. In one sense he was the last person who should have inherited the throne, as his father David's relationship with his mother Bathsheba began with adultery and murder. But God in grace forgives His servants when we repent and He blessed Solomon with wisdom to govern and the whole nation thrived.

However the latter part of Solomon's reign saw the seeds of national downfall being sown. The king welcomed diplomatic marriages, the foreign princesses brought their 'gods' with them, and the painful issue of idolatry began among God's people. They didn't stop believing in the Lord 'their' God, just flirted with other 'pretenders'.

This compromised God's blessing, sin always does!

The next generation saw the kingdom divide in two, North and South. There were some excellent kings but many poor ones whose example encouraged religious and moral decline. Eventually, despite the repeated warnings of prophet preachers like Elijah, Isaiah, Amos and Joel, first the Northern kingdom and then the Southern state of Judah which contained Jerusalem and this beautiful Temple were overrun by other powers and the people taken prisoner into exile in Babylon.

The Old Testament records rescue from slavery in Egypt, blessing in the Promised Land, glorious occasions like this, then tragic decline and exile, but the story was still far from over.

With God anything is possible. Salvation. Restoration. Homecoming. It may feel at times that we have lost ground, that all we have left is God's Word, but His promise given on the occasion of dedicating His house of prayer is faithful and strong:

'If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and *pray* and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.'