



“Now mine eyes shall be open, and mine ears attentive unto the prayer that is made in this place,” II Chronicles 7:15.

The House of Prayer

Lesson Subject: To realize the value of acceptable worship, and the danger of forsaking God.

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Topic: Prayer; Solomon.

The dedication of the house of God was one of the highlights of the history of Israel. Never had there been a building among the Hebrews like that one. King David had said of it, “**. . . the house that is to be builded for the Lord must be exceeding magnifical, of fame and of glory throughout all countries,**” I Chronicles 22:5.

The building was lavish in design and decoration. It was modeled after the tabernacle which was built at Mount Sinai under Moses' instruction, but it was much more costly and beautiful. Sheets of gold, intricately carved, overlaid the doors, and beautifully woven drapes decorated the walls. It was probably one of world's great wonders at that time.

The temple was dedicated with great ceremony. Choirs sang; trumpets blew; animals were sacrificed, and King Solomon knelt upon his knees before the people of Israel as he delivered the prayer of dedication.

In the midst of those great ceremonies, the magnificance of God came to Solomon's mind. He cried out, “**But will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded,**” I Kings 8:27.

God did dwell in the temple built for Him in Jerusalem. He had promised, “**I will dwell among the children of Israel, and will not forsake my people Israel,**” I Kings 6:13. The temple of God in Jerusalem became known as the house of prayer. As the lesson is surveyed, consider your

church as God's house of prayer for you. As you study, pray.

1. THE HOUSE OF PRAYER BUILT

The inspiration for building a temple to the Lord was conceived in the heart of David. He said to Nathan, prophet of God, **“I dwell in an house of cedar, but the ark of God dwelleth within curtains,”** II Samuel 7:2. David was among those saints who believed the house of God should be one of the finest buildings in the community. He was not content to live in a fine home while the Ark of the Lord remained in a tent. David resolved to build a temple to the Lord.

At first, the prophet Nathan approved David's decision. The Lord however, said, “No.” David was a man of war. God promised to cause David's son to follow him to the throne. That son, being a man of peace, would build God's house.

David accepted the word of the Lord. He was not content to leave all things to Solomon, however. Therefore, he sat about to gather materials to be used in building God's temple. The spoils of war were set aside for the project. The silver and gold received from all nations which he had subdued were set apart and dedicated to God. The king's personal contribution was tremendous. It included **“an hundred thousand talents of gold, and a thousand thousand talents of silver; and of brass and iron without weight . . . timber also and stone,”** I Chronicles 22:14-16. The princes of Israel were challenged to join in the offering. They gave **“five thousand talents and ten thousand drams of gold, ten thousand talents of silver, eighteen thousand talents of brass, and one hundred talents of iron,”** I Chronicles 29:7. Besides that, they gave precious stones of all manner and an abundance of marble as well. The value of the total contribution is beyond reckoning. It would be in the millions of dollars as money is counted today. **“Then the people rejoiced, for that they offered willingly, because with perfect heart they offered willingly to the Lord,”** I Chronicles 29:9.

David gathered the material, but construction of the temple was left to Solomon his son. Solomon received the materials and the plans for the temple from David, II Chronicles 28:11-19. He was charged, **“Now, my son, the Lord be with thee; and prosper thou, and build the house of the Lord thy God . . .”** I Chronicles 22:11. Those were almost the last words which the dying king David spoke to his son. The commission was solemn for them both. Even the princes of Israel had been urged to co-operate with Solomon in the building of the house of God, and they did.

Even the common people got in on the glory of building God's house.

No fewer than 70,000 were used to bear burdens; another 80,000 cut wood or stone in the mountains, and 3,600 were overseers of the work crews. Even non-Israelites who were in the land of Israel were conscripted for the work.

Foreigners, too, were enlisted. An agreement with Hiram, the king of Tyre, brought skilled artisans who could work in metal and cloth as well as the purchase of cedar trees, fir trees, and algum trees out of Lebanon. The total number of people who worked on the temple is not given, but it probably exceeded a quarter of a million. Even so, it took seven years for the house of God to be built, I Kings 6:37-38.

II. THE HOUSE OF PRAYER SANCTIFIED

The house of the Lord was sanctified by praise. The account is found in I Kings 8. Solomon and all the people praised God for the inspiration and foresight which had caused their fathers to plan for the temple to be built. They recognized, as should we, that much of the benefits enjoyed then had come through the faithfulness of their ancestors. They also praised God for His faithfulness. He had promised to set upon David's throne a son who would build the temple. His promise had been fulfilled in exact detail by Solomon. The king declared, **“Blessed be the Lord, that hath given rest unto his people Israel, according to all he promised: there hath not failed one word of all his good promise,”** I Kings 8:56.

The house of the Lord was sanctified by prayer. Read the great prayer of dedication which Solomon prayed, I Kings 8:22-26; II Chronicles 6:1-42.

His prayer recognized the sovereignty of God: **“Lord God of Israel, there is no God like thee, in heaven above, or on earth beneath . . .”** I Kings 8:23. It recognized the faithfulness of God: **“Who hast kept . . . that thou promisedst . . . thou spakest also with thy mouth and hast fulfilled it with thine hand, as it is this day,”** I Kings 8:24. It recognized the immensity of God: **“But will God in very deed dwell with men on the earth? behold, the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house which I have built,”** II Chronicles 6:18. It sought the presence of God: **“Now, my God, let, I beseech thee, thine eyes be open, and thine ears be attent unto the prayer that is made in this place,”** II Chronicles 6:40.

The house of the Lord was sanctified by sacrifice. One can hardly believe his eyes when he reads that there were 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep sacrificed at the dedication of the temple, II Chronicles 7:5. So many animals were sacrificed that it could not be done at the brazen altar of the temple, 7:7. The explanation is seen in that the people held a fourteen-day

feast throughout the whole nation **“from the entering in of Hamath unto the river of Egypt,”** I Kings 8:65. The animals were not wasted; they were consumed before the Lord. Then the people **“went unto their tents joyful and glad of heart for all the goodness of the Lord,”** 8:66.

The house of the Lord was sanctified by the presence of God. All else would have been vain, if God had not condescended to accept the temple as His holy sanctuary. God said to Solomon, **“I have heard thy prayer . . . I have hallowed this house . . . to put my name there for ever; and mine eyes and mine heart shall be there perpetually,”** I Kings 9:3. **“Now when Solomon had made an end of praying, the fire came down from heaven, and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices; and the glory of the Lord filled the house. And the priests could not enter into the house of the Lord, because the glory of the Lord had filled the Lord's house,”** II Chronicles 7:1-2. Amen and amen! The house of the Lord was sanctified by the presence of the Lord. May it ever be so in your church and mine!

III. THE HOUSE OF PRAYER USED

The house of prayer may be used as a place to meet God. God promised, **“Now mine eyes shall be open, and mine ears attent unto the prayer that is made in this place,”** II Chronicles 7:15. God will hear prayer offered any place, but there is something significant about prayer offered in the house of God when one is among the people of God. The house of prayer is the place to deal with sin. It was in the context of the temple that the Lord promised, **“If my people, which are called by my name, shall 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,”** II Chronicles 7:14. Do you have a penitent spirit when you come into God's house?

IV. THE HOUSE OF PRAYER ABUSED

God warned against abuse of the house of prayer. The presence of God's house, with frequent attendance thereto, will not excuse careless living. God warned Israel, **“If ye shall turn away, and forsake my statutes and my commandments, which I have set before you . . . then will I pluck them up by the roots out of my land which I have given them; and this house, which I have sanctified for my name, will I cast out of my sight, and will make it to be a proverb and a byword among all**

nations,” II Chronicles 7:19-20.

In spite of His warning, in later years Israel turned from the Lord. She adopted the ways and worship of the heathen about her. She even set up pagan idols in the very temple of the Lord. God spoke through His prophet Isaiah saying that He would not hear prayers offered in the temple, He would not accept sacrifices offered there, He would not be pleased with their assemblies in His house, Isaiah 1:10-15. The problem was that the people were using rituals of worship as a substitute for holy living. (That is still a very real danger.) The result was that performance of religious rituals only increased their sin, Amos 4:4-5. How terrible that men would try to hide their evil under the cloke of religious activity. Men have always been enticed to do that, but they have never succeeded in deceiving God.

In the days of the prophet Jeremiah, the people had come to look with a superstitious reverence upon the temple. They had perverted it even further from God's intended purpose. (No wonder the prophet Ezekiel saw a vision in which the presence of God left the Most Holy Place, Ezekiel 9.) The people had perverted the temple of the Lord. They thought its very presence was a guarantee of their safety in spite of their sins, Jeremiah 7:1-15. It was not so.

God's forewarned judgment fell. Compare II Chronicles 7:19-22 with II Chronicles 36:14-19. God had warned, "If you turn away into sin, I will pluck up the nation and will destroy this temple so that everyone who sees it will be astonished, asking why such a thing happened. The explanation will be that the people forsook their God." When the judgment fell, the Chaldeans (Babylonians) slaughtered young Jewish men in the very sanctuary of the temple. They removed all the treasure which was in the temple. Then they burned the house of God. All that was the fulfillment of God's warnings through His prophets.

For seventy years (586 B.C. to 516 B.C.) Israel had no "house of prayer." The majority of the people were taken away into Babylonian Captivity. There they were cured of their propensity to idolatry; they learned to reverence and to obey the God of their fathers. Upon their repentance, God brought them back to Palestine under such leaders as Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah. He settled the nation in her land once more. Her temple was rebuilt. Once again Israel had a house of prayer. Had she learned her lesson? Would she keep herself pure before God? History told the story.

The public ministry of Jesus Christ began with His cleansing of the temple in Jerusalem. Coming to Jerusalem at the Passover season, He found oxen, sheep, and doves for sale in the very precincts of the temple. He drove them out, with those who sold them and who changed money into the temple

currency. He said, **“Take these things hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise,”** John 2:16.

The reformation did not last. Toward the conclusion of His earthly ministry (about three years after His first cleansing of the temple), Jesus cleansed the temple the second time. He cast out those who bought and sold in the temple. He overthrew the tables of the money changers. He said, **“My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves,”** Matthew 21:12-13. Israel had not learned her lesson. How difficult it is for depraved people to keep to spiritual use the house of God.

Your church building is “the house of prayer” for you. Take warning. Do not misuse or abuse your privilege as a member of your church. Never substitute the rituals of religion for the reality of a personal relationship with God as He has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ.

The aim of today's study is “to realize the value of acceptable worship and the danger of forsaking God.” If you look upon your church with greater respect and are more resolved than before that you will be faithful to God in the spiritual ministry of your church, this lesson has had its intended ministry in you.

Do not forsake the house of God. Rituals of religion will not substitute for righteousness. Neither will private devotions substitute for public worship. Assemble with God's people. Thereby you will be an obedient Christian; you will both get and give a blessing.

“Blessed are they that dwell in thy house: they will be still praising thee,” Psalm 84:4.

Questions

1. Why was the temple called a house of prayer?
2. In what sense is your church a house of prayer?
3. Why was the temple built?
4. How was it financed?
5. Why should the church building be beautiful and comfortable?
6. How was the temple sanctified to God's worship?
7. How was forgiveness of sins related to the temple?
8. What judgment did God forewarn for sin?
9. In what way might we desecrate God's house?
10. How has this study profited you?