

# 1 Kings 8:1-11

## The Temple: Atonement

Imagine a scenario where little Johnny, a rambunctious young man, is sent outside to play by his exhausted mother. An hour later, she discovers that he failed to clean his room as she had asked. She hollers for the boy to come inside to clean his room, but as he approaches the front door, she realizes little Johnny is covered in mud. What does the mother do? She can either send Johnny upstairs to his room or, first, hose him down. The answer is obvious. Only a fool would ignore the mud.

The same is true regarding our redemption and spiritual well-being. The fundamental question of the Bible is, how can humans stand in the presence of a holy God? There are only two options: religion or grace. Given that this climatic chapter is about how the God of glory manages to dwell among his people, the means of that achievement is addressed first. God can only dwell with us when we are cleansed by means of atonement.

In the opening two verses, all of Israel and her leaders are assembled to witness the consecration of the Temple. The timing is significant. The writer wants us to know that this consecration service took place “at the feast in the month of Ethanim, which is the 7<sup>th</sup> month.” That is known as the Feast of Tabernacles which was one of three festivals in which Jews were encouraged to travel to Jerusalem. They would build booths and live in them for seven days to commemorate their journey through the wilderness and the conquering of the Promised Land and how God provided for them along the way.

The Feast of Tabernacles was a time of recommitment and renewal by remembrance. Solomon rightly saw the construction of the Temple as the fulfillment of God’s promises to his people. So, he utilizes this national holiday to call on Israel to be spiritually renewed.

Being assembled, the Ark of the Covenant was transferred into the “inner sanctuary.” Borrowing from the previous relocation effort, we can assume that the sacrifices offered during the parade took place every six steps. This, obviously, slowed the process down and required many sacrifices – so many that “they could not be counted or numbered” (1 Kings 8:5; 2 Chronicles 5:6).

The parade concluded when the priests brought the Ark into the Holy of Holies. The emphasis is on the “cherubim,” which are unique beings not to be confused with angels. They appear over sixty times throughout Scripture with the duties of guarding sacred space and upholding the sacred throne. Because the Jews were barred from making any images of God, they understood that he sat upon his throne carried by the cherubim (see Psalm 99:1).

Thus, when the High Priest entered the Inner Sanctuary, they didn't see God or any depiction of him, but the presence of the cherubim was a reminder that he was there.

What is most significant for our purposes is what the presence of the Ark sets up for Israel. God now dwells with his people, as made clear in verses. 10-11. By implication, the Jews could go directly toward God. The problem, however, was that man was stained with sin and therefore was unworthy to be near God. That's what the cherubim are there for. What was required was a Mediator and Atonement.

With the Ark of the Covenant in place, the people watch in awe as the heavy glory of God descended to rest in the inner sanctuary. The scene is so intense that even the priests, guarded by countless sacrifices and sanctified for the work they were doing, cannot be present. The presence of God is heavy indeed.

This is the climax of the Old Testament. It does not get better than this. This is what Abraham hoped for. This is what Moses worked for. This is what Joshua conquered for. This is what David prepared for. On this special day, the Jews watched as God tabernacled among them, and they beheld his glory.

This is the beauty of Christ. He embodies all of this. He is the presence of God who now sits atop the Cherubim. He is the Mediator between us and God. He is the High Priest who intercedes on our behalf. He is the atoning lamb that makes reconciliation possible.