

A Grand Building Project

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Preacher: Paul Barker

[0 : 00] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity on the 17th of October 2004. The preacher is Paul Barker.

His sermon is entitled A Grand Building Project and is based on 1 Kings 6-7.

Verse 1. So let's pray that God helps us because we need that.

Heavenly Father, you've caused all of scripture to be written for our being trained in righteousness. And even the chapter that we've heard read, we pray that you'll teach us from it. That not only will our minds be informed, but our lives reformed and transformed.

As a result of your word in our lives by your spirit. Amen. As most of you know, I've had a long service leave and only been back about five years from that, it seems to me.

[1 : 28] And one of the things of being on long service leave was seeing lots of interesting buildings in various places in different countries. One of the ones I went to, sometimes when you go to an interesting building, you've got your guidebook with you and it describes things.

I carry my Lonely Planet guide, for example, of different places. And sometimes the descriptions, you think, I don't understand what they're talking about. That's partly because I'm fairly ignorant about building processes and architectural terms and all that sort of thing.

Sometimes when you see a building, you go on a guided tour and somebody actually tells you and points things out. That's in one sense much more helpful, though not always is it convenient time-wise. But one building I went to with a guided tour of a guide saying what was what was the City Hall of Stockholm.

And it's the venue for the Nobel Prize winning banquet, not where the presentation is made, but where the banquet occurs after the Nobel Prizes that occur in Sweden in December each year.

It's the City Hall or the Town Hall, we might call it in Melbourne, of Stockholm. It was built by an architect who was relatively eccentric, although that may be typical of architects. And it was full of all sorts of things created at his whim in this building.

[2 : 46] For example, there's what I think they called, if I remember rightly, the Oval Room. It's where marriages occur, civil marriages, and you can have the short or the long version. The short version marriage ceremony lasts 40 seconds.

The long version, three minutes. Sometimes I've conducted marriages here and thought three minutes would be quite nice, but they go a bit longer than that. I couldn't find out whether the length of actual marriage matched the length of the ceremony.

There were lots of things that were strange. He was very fussy about hiding all the heating elements. It's not an old building. It's, well, 100 years old at the most, I think, maybe less. So there were cupboards that had nothing in them other than that's where the heating was, and the heating came out of various hidden ducts and things like that.

And the staircase into the Grand Hall, he was very picky about. And he got his wife, who presumably must have been picky if she was married to an architect, to walk up and down this staircase wearing a gown so that they made sure that the stairs were at the right intervals and heights for people coming in elegantly dressed, especially women in high heels with long gowns, so that they wouldn't have to hitch up a gown and be tripping over steps as they made their grand entrance into the hall.

Well, if I just had a guidebook, that would have been a little bit hard to follow, some of those things about the Stockholm City Hall. But having somebody point things out and being able to see each thing was very helpful.

[4 : 16] In some ways, reading this chapter is like having a guidebook to the old temple of Jerusalem of Solomon's day, and maybe many of us wished that we actually had pictures, and I'd even thought of throwing up some pictures of what it might have looked like.

They say that a picture's worth a thousand words and so on. Well, apart from disorganisation for not having pictures, I can give a bit more of an excuse.

God's revealed these things to us in words rather than pictures, and there are things in what he says in his words about this temple that no picture would actually convey for us.

Sometimes a picture will help understand some things, certainly. But some of the key things the pictures would not tell us. They don't tell us everything, and they don't tell us the important things, perhaps.

So what are the important things in this chapter about the building of the temple in Solomon's day? The first thing is the date in verse 1. Most buildings have a foundation stone or some plaque or something to tell us when it was built or who the architect was or whatever, and we're told here that it's the fourth year of Solomon's reign that this temple was begun to be built.

[5 : 28] Now, of course, in those days they wouldn't have put 960 BC. That's about when it was because, of course, you can't measure BC until after BC's ended, if you understand what I mean, when Jesus came. But fourth year of the reign of the king was the usual way of determining the year.

Fourth year of Solomon's reign for us about 960 BC, nearly 3,000 years ago. But the more important date, probably, in verse 1, is when it tells us that it's the 480th year after the Israelites came out of the land of Egypt.

Now, that's not just telling us how long a period had elapsed. Israel, if you remember way back towards the beginning of the Bible, in the second book, Exodus, had come out of slavery in Egypt in the leadership of Moses through miracles performed by God, the parting of the Red Sea, for example, about 1440 BC.

They'd spent 40 years in the wilderness, in the desert, before they arrived in the promised land under Moses' successor, Joshua. And though they initially conquered that land fairly easily in the early years, for the next 400 years their hold on the land was relatively precarious, as you read in the book of Judges, in the books of Samuel.

Finally, they had a king, but a bad one, Saul, followed by a good king, David, the father of Solomon, who's the king at the time of one kings that we're reading. But through all of that time, in effect, what this is saying to us is that the whole process and event of the liberation of God's people and their establishment in God's land is only really now being completed.

[7 : 01] It's taken 480 years, a vastly long time. If you think back, that takes us back to the time of Martin Luther for us today, a long period of time. But God, in his own time, in his own patient time, is finally bringing about the securing of that act of redemption with the building of the temple in Jerusalem.

And the key to seeing it in that light comes back in the previous chapter. If you cast your eye across to the left-hand page, but the middle column at the top, verse 3 of chapter 5 says, You know that my father David could not build a house for the name of the Lord his God because of the warfare with which his enemies surrounded him until the Lord put them under the soles of his feet.

But now the Lord my God has given me rest on every side. There's neither adversary nor misfortune, so I intend to build a house for the name of the Lord my God. The issue is now there is rest.

Not just the Sunday afternoon nap in the sun or the doze by the TV, that sort of rest. It's a rest in the sense of secure hold on the land that God has given under the rule of God that he's given to his people.

And it echoes, as we'll see later on, the idea of the initial creation rest in Genesis chapters 1 and 2 at the very beginning of the whole of the creation.

[8 : 21] So that's the first thing of note. And no picture would give us that information. It's hearing words in verse 1. Now secondly, let's imagine that we're on this tour.

Our guide is taking us firstly around the outside of the temple. That's verses 2 to 10. These verses are a bit hard to understand because it's hard to imagine what's being described.

Let me try and do it. Firstly, we're told in verse 2 that the house that Solomon built for the Lord was 60 cubits long, 20 cubits wide and 30 cubits high. It's basically rectangular.

Probably that would be smaller than this part of the church building. A cubit is the length from the tip of your elbow to your hand. Well, it became standardised obviously because everyone's tip of elbow to hand will differ from person to person.

Can you imagine that? Trying to build a building and one person measures a cubit on this wall and a different person there and the building's like that. So it does get standardised to about 18 inches roughly. So we're dealing with something here that's about 90 feet long, 30 feet wide and about 45 feet high.

[9 : 29] Relatively big but not as big as some other ancient temples in other parts of the ancient world. It's rectangular. At one end, the far end, the holy end shall I say, it's marked off by a curtain and that far end is square in the floor space, 20 cubits by 20 cubits and it's only 20 cubits high so there's some sort of hidden ceiling above it to make it lower.

Outside it is the nave which is now 40 cubits long, 20 cubits wide, 30 cubits high, a big, big nave and then there's a vestibule or a hall entrance at the far end.

We're walking around it. We're seeing the stonework that's described in verses 2 to 10. We're seeing some of the cedar imported from Lebanon that's being used for its building as well.

And around the outside of it, especially the long sides it seems, on the outside, maybe not with doors in, we're not sure about that, was a wooden structure which was probably some form of storage rooms.

And if you try and picture what's described in verses 5 to 6 and then 8 to 10, it's a bit tricky. It looks like it's a three-storey storage shelter where it sort of leans inwards, each story coming in, as though somehow there's a passageway underneath and it's like a flying buttress on the outside.

[10 : 49] So that's what's described in verses 2 to 10. That's the outside, mainly a stone and some cedar. Before we go inside though, verses 11 to 13 tell us something that no picture would ever tell us.

It's a word from the Lord. It's deliberately in the middle of the context of the building. It's not just at the beginning preceding it, it's embedded in the instructions of building.

It tells us, you see, that the building of the temple is not just a matter of getting your building materials and dimensions right. There is a crucial moral dimension. The word of the Lord came to Solomon, verse 11.

Concerning this house that you are building, if you will walk in my statutes, obey my ordinances, and people my commandments by walking in them, then I will establish my promise with you, which I made to your father David.

That is, I will dwell among the children of Israel and will not forsake my people Israel. Solomon could build all he liked. He could follow all of God's dimensions.

[11 : 55] But unless Solomon the king walked in God's ways, kept his commandments, obeyed his laws, God would never take up residence in that building and he wouldn't stay in residence in that building.

There's an important and crucial moral dimension here. It's not just about a grand building. It's God's house. That's what's being built.

And God will dwell in it. Not just if the building's done right, but more importantly, that Solomon the king leads the people with upright morality and faithfulness to God.

The promises of verse 14, that God will dwell in this midst and that he will never forsake Israel, are promises he's made earlier on in the scriptures a number of times. Always conditional on the ongoing obedience and faithfulness of God's people.

So that's the third thing. crucial in the middle of all of these instructions. Well, now let's take our tour inside the building. Imagine the guide is holding up one of those fancy coloured flags or umbrellas and saying, come along, come along, and you're following the umbrella and the crowd of the tourists.

[13 : 03] And we're taken through, not just into the porch area, but we're taken straight through to the holy place before we actually work our way out. The first instructions from verse 14 onwards deal with the inner shrine, the most holy place, the cubic end at the holy end of this temple building that's being built.

Now remember here too, that no Israelite would have access to this place. The only person who would go in there was the high priest and only once a year, only on the Day of Atonement, only carrying the blood of the Atonement sacrifice.

That's the only person who would know what the inside's like from personal viewing. So for any ancient Israelite, this is it, their description of it, unless they knew the high priest and asked him what it was looking like.

So this is a very, in a sense, precious description for any ancient Israelite, let alone us, of course, who live well beyond the era of the temple. And the thing probably that strikes us in this description of this inner shrine is its beauty and splendour.

It is stunning. You see, the stone on the outside you don't see on the inside because on the inside it's lined with cedar and then the cedar is lined or overlaid with gold.

[14 : 24] The walls, the ceiling it seems, perhaps, the floor certainly, even the altar of incense overlaid with gold. It's like being in a gold box, in a sense, no windows on it either.

It would be stunning to think of something like that. See, for example, verses 20 to 22. The interior of the inner sanctuary was 20 cubits long, 20 cubits wide and 20 cubits high.

He overlaid it with pure gold. He also overlaid the altar with cedar. Solomon overlaid the inside of the house with pure gold. Then he drew chains of gold across in front of the inner sanctuary, presumably the chains that would hold the curtain or the veil to stop people looking in and overlaid it with gold.

Next he overlaid the whole house with gold in order that the whole house might be perfect. Even the whole altar that belonged to the inner sanctuary he overlaid with gold. It's very ornate. The most expensive product that could be used in this temple and it would be glittering and glorious, we're told in verse 22, perfect.

It's trying to capture something of the glory and majesty of God because that holy room was his throne room in effect. Though no people could go in apart from that one person I mentioned.

[15 : 39] As I said, this holy place is cubic, same length as depth, as height. It housed, we're told in verse 19, the Ark of the Covenant. I'm not sure whether Harrison Ford ever found the Ark.

It was a futile quest. It was probably destroyed by the Babylonians in the 6th century BC. The Ark was just a box really, about so big, so high.

Inside it was placed the two tablets of stone on which were the Ten Commandments given to Moses at Mount Sinai 480 years before these events here.

Inside it also was the remnant of the manna from heaven that fed Israel during the wilderness and the rod that Aaron, the priest, first priest, brother of Moses had. That Ark itself was covered over with gold.

That description had happened hundreds of years before as well when it was originally built back in the time of the book of Exodus and Leviticus at Mount Sinai. And above the Ark on either end were cherubim, little angel type figures which I'll make comment about in a minute.

[16 : 41] Not described here, that's other cherubim, but they faced each other across the Ark and in the space in between was meant to be the throne of God. No symbol for God, no statue for God, just in a sense an empty space.

But that's where the invisible God was regarded as dwelling and ruling from by his law. The next thing that the description on the inside tells us is about the furnishings and the one thing that strikes us from verse 23 onwards is cherubim.

Now we probably think of a cherub as being like a cute little kid's face with little wings from one of those, is it Raphael's paintings or whatever it is, those fairly kitsch cards that you can buy in shops and so on.

That's not really what a cherub was like. We've got it all wrong from those paintings. A cherub would have had a body like a lion, a human face, huge wings. It would have been a more terrifying figure.

In the British Museum and also in the Met Museum in New York, you can see some of these huge stone statues from the times of the Assyrians, from Nineveh and Nimrod's palaces.

[17 : 50] Great big monsters of lions standing, looking fairly ferocious, guarding the entrance to the king's palace. That's more like what a cherub would have been like. guarding the entry, protecting people from entering inadvertently into the presence of God's own throne room.

These were wooden, olive wood, but they're overlaid with gold as well, we're told, in verses 23 to 28. Not only were there these two huge cherubs with wings outstretched in the most holy place, fairly terrifying figures as I say, but in the carvings around and also in the outer nave, there were carvings of cherubim on the wood as well and in addition to that, carvings of fruit and palms and open flowers probably to show sort of beauty as well as fertility around the place.

So verses 20 up to 30 describe the inner sanctuary, the most holy place. 31 to 35 takes us outside that into the nave area, more carvings, more gold, more cherubim guarding the entry and then verse 36 takes us out further to what's called the inner court, the court of the priests probably.

Beyond that, the men were allowed, beyond that again on the outside, the women were allowed but this was the court of priests. Here we see stone in verse 36 on the inside, everywhere further in, the stone is covered over with gold and cedar and we're told in verse 36 that for every three courses of stone there was a course of cedar which is probably slightly odd but you can imagine a stone wall, three layers of stone and then you see a wooden layer and then more stone.

There's evidence of that in the ancient world and most probably it's probably protected the structure from earthquakes which were fairly, well are fairly common in the Middle East. At the end of the chapter we're told in verses 37 and 38 it took seven years to build, seven and a half technically, rounded to seven in verse 38.

[19 : 45] just to fill in the picture a bit, the building lasted about 400 years, it was finally destroyed by the Babylonians in 587 under Nebuchadnezzar, their leader.

Seventy years later Israel returned to Jerusalem and they rebuilt it, not quite as grand as first, in 515 and that building lasted a long, long time. Just before Jesus came, Herod the Great, the ruler over that area at the time, refurbished it substantially, major works, making it more ornate, more lavish, more substantial mound on which it was built.

But finally, that didn't last so long, destroyed in 70 AD by the Romans, never rebuilt and now on its site is that gold domed, ornate dome of the rock it's called, a mosque built in 691 AD.

Now why do we get all this detail here in chapter 6? Bit tedious? What's it really about? Doesn't look particularly practical either. Why is it here?

Well certainly we could say that the expensive materials used, the imported cedar, the gold that is used, the, verse 7 tells us no hammering and chiselling would happen on site, it would be done elsewhere because it's such a sacred site.

[20 : 59] All of that shows a very careful and devoted loyalty to God. Only the best, the, no expenses spared in the building of this temple in Jerusalem.

The importance of giving of the best and indeed most lavish back to God is part of this principle that's being stated here. We might say it's a godly extravagance in all its expense.

And certainly the splendour and the expensiveness of it is meant to capture something of the glory and the majesty of God himself. The sense of using gold, the best and most valuable material that you could ever imagine in the ancient world and so on.

So it's not just to build an awesome building, it's to actually direct attention to an awesome God, a splendid and glorious God. But there is more of importance here and in the big sweep of the story of the Bible and what God's on about for our universe, this temple plays a crucial part.

The temple is part of, a key part of the plan of God for the creation and preservation of this universe. And indeed from the beginning though it looks so permanent God never intended it to be permanent.

[22 : 17] It's just a symbol, a temporary building still in the end pointing towards something else. Yes, it points towards Jesus yet to come. Ironically the temple points to its opposite in a sense.

That is, the temple ultimately points to heaven where there's no temple as I'll explain in a minute. From the beginning God's desire is to have intimacy with his people.

He set up the creation like that in the very first pages of the Bible at the beginning of history when he made the world and in particular a garden of Eden where humans lived in the immediate presence of God in the garden.

Uninhibited relationship between God and his people. That's the garden of Eden. But we know if we've read our Bibles the first three pages or so that it didn't last long like that.

Human beings failed and fell. They sinned, they disobeyed God and they didn't trust him and as a result God expelled Adam and Eve from the garden and he set up at the entrance of the garden of Eden to the east cherubim to guard the entry to prevent Adam and Eve or any of their children and grandchildren etc.

[23 : 31] from re-entering into God's presence because they were sinners. The description of the building of the temple here has echoes of the garden of Eden.

There are cherubim guarding the entry to the presence of God. The entrance to the temple faces east. We read that in another part not this chapter. The carvings of fruit and palm trees suggests garden like imagery.

The gold and the precious stone are things that were found in the garden of Eden in Genesis 2. At the heart of the garden of Eden was the presence of God and at the heart of the temple would be the presence of God as well.

There are other similarities but they're the key ones for now with one more. Both the garden of Eden and this temple were premised on the people of God at rest.

The description of the garden of Eden follows immediately after the description of the first day of rest at the beginning of Genesis 2. And we've already seen how this building of the temple follows the description in the previous chapter of the people of God at rest.

[24 : 39] And rest as I've said is not mere idleness or laziness. Rest is putting everything in harmony under God and in relationship with God. That's how he made it all at the very beginning of creation and that's what he's seeking to restore as he works in this world and this universe.

And so the building of the temple at the time of rest in the days of Solomon was to be symbolic of where God is still heading in his purposes for creation and also echoing and also echoing his initial purposes as seen in the Garden of Eden.

That God and his creation and his people in relationship with him under his rule are in harmony or at rest with God. And the building of the temple then reminds us that God keeps hold of his purpose.

He didn't give up when Adam and Eve sinned and he expelled them from the garden. He didn't say oh well to hell with all humans I'm not having anything more to do with them ever again but rather he sought a long term plan to bring about their restoration in a relationship with him.

And that plan has had several steps up to this point and the building of this temple is a crucial step in that. So that God will dwell in the midst of a people who are even sinful.

[26 : 00] Even Solomon the king is sinful because he actually spends more time and effort building his own palace after building this one and we saw that last week in other ways as well. The building of this temple shows us a God who's not given up wanting to be in a relationship with his people for eternity.

It's still a fractured relationship because the events that happen in the temple not described here show the need to deal with sin by sacrifice.

But this temple is not the final step. It's only a sketch drawing. Some of you saw the model that we had built when we did these church extensions a couple of years ago.

That model is a bit like this temple. That is not this final building like the temple but the model is like the temple because the ultimate reality lies beyond the Jerusalem temple in heaven and beyond Jesus even coming.

You see the next big step is when Jesus came. God's now personal presence human presence in the midst of his people not just as a building and a symbol of presence with cherubim and altars and so on but a personal presence tabernacling dwelling pitching his tent amongst us as it's described in John's gospel.

[27 : 23] And the New Testament makes it clear that the people of God you and I who are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ are in a sense not just stones in a building but living stones being built into a holy temple for the Lord.

Not a building of stone but a building of people. And all of this anticipates the final pages of the Bible the description of heaven the destiny of Christian people.

You see this building of the temple is not here to give us some idea about how to build a cathedral or how to do a church extension not at all. Ultimately it's directing us to heaven.

And at the very end of the Bible we find a description of heaven as the New Jerusalem. The dimensions of the New Jerusalem are cubic. It's the only other cubic thing in the Bible. Indeed we could say it's super cubic because it's about 1500 kilometres long 1500 kilometres wide and 1500 kilometres high.

That's a bit bigger than the skyscrapers of New York I saw a few weeks ago. But there will be no cherubim there to guard the entry. The gates will be open for people to come in. It will be full of precious stones and gold and all the sorts of things of this temple.

[28 : 33] But in the middle of it will be the very presence of God. Not behind a curtain, not just symbolised in space and cherubim and so on. No mediated presence of God by priests.

The very presence of God with his people for eternity. remember what those final words almost of the Bible say. I saw no temple in the city for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb and the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it for the glory of God is its light and its lamp is the Lamb.

This temple that Solomon was instructed to build speaks to us of a God who is determined to restore a relationship with his people. Not without dismissing his holiness.

And so the glory and the splendour of the gold and the materials and the curtain that covers that inner shrine speaks of a holy God whom sinful people ought not cast their eyes upon.

But it points to the day when we will see God face to face. Our sin dealt with and done away with by that perfect sacrifice of Jesus. And we will dwell in the eternal holy place, the new Jerusalem prepared by God, ready for us.

[30 : 03] That will be more dazzling and more glorious, more beautiful and more eternal, more stunning and more perfect than even the gold covered in a shrine of the temple built by Solomon.

God is determined to bring about that restoration of relationship with us. And this temple is a crucial step towards it, but ultimately not to a building, but to perfected people in the perfect presence of God.

A God who takes up his dwelling in us now by his spirit, sent by his son. And that eternal glory of heaven is secured for us who believe in him by the death of his son on the cross.

Amen. Thank you.