

The Temple in Chronicles

In our overview of the Books of the Samuel and Kings, we know that King David wanted to build a “house” (temple, tabernacle) for the Lord, but instead God promised to build David a “house” (dynasty). Nonetheless, King David brought the Ark of the Covenant (but not the Tent of Meeting which was still in Gibeon) to Jerusalem (1 Chron 5). There he built a “tent” to house the Ark (1 Chron 21). The building of the “house” (permanent Tent of Meeting) was left to David’s son King Solomon. The plans for the Temple are described in 1 Chronicles 22-28, but the construction and dedication of the Temple is one of the major topics of 2 Chronicles.

The temple played an important role in the theology of the Chronicler for it served as a constant reminder that Israel was the people of God. The Chronicler used many different designations to describe the temple in Jerusalem. The Chronicler said that the temple was a **בֵּית-יְהוָה**, an exalted house, a place where Yahweh would live forever (2 Chr 6:2). The temple was God’s dwelling place (2 Chr 6:21).

According to the Chronicler, the place where the temple was to be built was not selected by David. The site was selected by the angel of the Lord (1 Chr 21:18-19). The site where the temple was built was the place where David prayed and asked for God’s grace on behalf of the people (1 Chr 21:17). Thus, at the site where the temple was to be built, God forgave David’s sin and consecrated the place with fire from heaven (1 Chr 21:26). By emphasizing these incidents, the Chronicler was declaring that the temple was a place where sins were forgiven and prayers answered.

The Chronicler also emphasized that David received the plan for the construction of the temple directly from the Lord (1 Chr 28:19).

Below are some of the names the Chronicler used for the temple:

1. 2 Chr. 26:16 Temple of the LORD
2. 2 Chr. 29:3 House of the LORD
3. 1 Chr. 9:13 House of God
4. 1 Chr. 22:1 House of the LORD God
5. 1 Chr. 28:20 House of Rest for the Ark of the Covenant of the LORD and for the Footstool of Our God
6. 1 Chr. 28:3 House for My Name
7. 1 Chr. 29:2 House of My God (David’s)
8. 1 Chr. 29:3 Holy House
9. 1 Chr. 29:16 House for Your Holy Name
10. 2 Chr. 2:4 House to the Name of the LORD
11. 2 Chr. 6:7 House for the Name of the LORD God of Israel
12. 1 Chr. 22:19 Sanctuary of the LORD God
13. 2 Chr. 6:2 Exalted House
14. 2 Chr. 6:2 Place for God to Reside Forever
15. 2 Chr. 6:2 Place for God’s Dwelling
16. 2 Chr. 6:21 Dwelling Place
17. 2 Chr. 30:27 Holy Dwelling Place

Recall that the theme from *Exodus*, amplified in *Leviticus*, and emphasized in *Numbers* and *Deuteronomy*, was “holiness” and the “presence of God” among the people of God. Throughout *Chronicles* the author repeats these themes again and again. The Temple was the life center of the people of God, the hub of the Lord’s kingdom on earth. The Chronicler also portrayed the temple in Jerusalem as the center of holiness and blessing and showed that as people are brought into respectful and obedient proximity to it, they are blessed.

The temple was a house of prayer for all people (Isa 56:7), a place where God would be accessible to everyone who called on him in time of need. Of the temple, God said: “*now I have chosen and consecrated this house that my name may be there forever; my eyes and my heart shall be there always*” (2 Chr 7:16). Since God’s heart was in the temple, anyone who prayed to him was assured that God was attentive to their prayers, even when they prayed from “*the land of their captivity*” (2 Chr 6:38).

Dedication of the Temple

The dedication of the Temple is described in 2 Chron 6 and following as it provides an extended accounting of “Solomon’s Prayer.” Here are some excerpts from that lengthy prayer:

When your people Israel are defeated by an enemy because they have sinned against you, and then they turn, praise your name, pray to you, and entreat you in this house, listen from heaven and forgive the sin of your people Israel, and bring them back to the land you gave them and their ancestors. When the heavens are closed so that there is no rain, because they have sinned against you, but they pray toward this place and praise your name, and turn from their sin because you have afflicted them, listen in heaven and forgive the sin of your servants, your people Israel. (For you teach them the good way in which they should walk.) Give rain upon this land of yours which you have given to your people as their heritage. (2 Chron 6:24-27)

When your people go out to war against their enemies, by whatever way you send them, and they pray to you toward the city you have chosen and the house I have built for your name, listen from heaven to their prayer and petition, and uphold their cause. When they sin against you (for there is no one who does not sin), and in your anger against them you deliver them to an enemy, so that their captors carry them off to another land, far or near, and they have a change of heart in the land of their captivity and they turn and entreat you in the land of their captors and say, ‘We have sinned and done wrong; we have been wicked,’ if with all their heart and soul they turn back to you in the land of those who took them captive, and pray toward their land which you gave their ancestors, the city you have chosen, and the house which I have built for your name, listen from heaven, the place of your enthronement, to their prayer and petitions, and uphold their cause. Forgive your people who have sinned against you. (2 Chron 6:34-39)

The language that the Chronicler employs about the Temple is a marked change from that used by the author of Samuel and Kings. There is a repeated emphasis on the Temple as a place of fellowship, forgiveness, atonement, reconciliation, and renewal

Sacred Place, Sacred Symbol

Throughout 2 Chronicles, the Temple's the symbol of God's relationship with the people. It's where sacrifices are offered—sacrifices of thanksgiving, atonement, and petition. Jewish worship at that time was primarily done through these sacrifices by the priests. So when the Temple is well-maintained and

properly cared for, things go well in Judah. But when it falls into disrepair or idols start appearing inside it, then trouble's on the horizon.

- *For the wicked Athaliah and her sons had damaged the house of God and had even turned over to the Baals the holy things of the LORD's house. (24:7)*
- *They abandoned the house of the LORD, the God of their ancestors, and began to serve the asherahs and the idols; and because of this crime of theirs, wrath came upon Judah and Jerusalem. (24:18)*
- *Everything that he undertook, for the service of the house of God or for the law and the commandment, was to seek his God. He did this with all his heart, and he prospered.. (31:21)*
- *He removed the foreign gods and the idol from the LORD's house and all the altars he had built on the mount of the LORD's house and in Jerusalem, and cast them outside the city. (33:15)*
- *Likewise all the princes of Judah, the priests, and the people added treachery to treachery, practicing all the abominations of the nations and defiling the LORD's house which he had consecrated in Jerusalem (36:14)*

In fact, the disobedient and unfaithful behavior of the people is what leads to the Temple finally being destroyed after standing for about 400 years. God's so filled with wrath about the people's disobedience that he lets the Babylonian Empire destroy Jerusalem and the Temple:

They burned the house of God, broke down the wall of Jerusalem, burned all its palaces with fire, and destroyed all its precious vessels. (36:19)

So the Temple has been destroyed and the Ark of the Covenant is lost forever. This is a devastating event for the nation. God's house—the place where he promised to live forever among his people—is nothing more than a pile of rubble in the middle of Jerusalem. The symbol of Judah's eternal relationship with God is in ruins. Much of the population has been hauled off to Babylon and is mourning for Jerusalem.

But God hasn't abandoned his people; he pulled back for about 70 years but kept his eye on them. Thanks to King Cyrus being moved by the spirit of God, the exiles in Babylon are eventually allowed to come back home and start building a new Temple:

Thus says Cyrus, king of Persia: The LORD, the God of heaven, has given to me all the kingdoms of the earth. He has also charged me to build him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. All among you, therefore, who belong to his people, may their God be with them; let them go up.(36:23)

Manasseh

As in *Kings*, the Chronicler provides us with an account of the Kings – much of the information taken from *Kings*, but from time to time, offering us new information. While a detailed study might point out all the differences, there is one addition in *Chronicles* that stands apart: the story of King Manasseh. He was a king of Judah between King Hezekiah and Josiah (both of whom are praised) - and he is judged to be the worst of a long line of bad kings (2 Kings 21).

Manasseh profaned the Temple with idols of false gods, introduced child sacrifice: “*Manasseh, king of Judah, has practiced these abominations, and has done greater evil than all that was done by the Amorites before him, and has led Judah into sin.*” (2 Kings 21:11)

“Manasseh shed so much innocent blood that it filled the length and breadth of Jerusalem, in addition to the sin he caused Judah to commit by doing what was evil in the LORD’s sight.” (2 Kings 21:16)

It is during this time that God’s judgment of the curse of Exile upon the people is announced (2 Kings 21:12-15)

And yet, 2 Chron 33 tells the story of the conversion of Manasseh, something not even hinted at in *Kings*: *In his distress, he began to appease the LORD, his God. He humbled himself abjectly before the God of his ancestors, and prayed to him.* The LORD let himself be won over: he heard his prayer and restored him to his kingdom in Jerusalem. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD is indeed God.*” (2 Chron 33:12-13)

* Some later editions of this chapter have appended Manasseh’s prayer, an apocryphal work (noncanonical), one of a collection of songs appended to the Old Testament book of Psalms in several manuscripts of the Septuagint (the Greek version of the Hebrew Bible)

I have sinned, O Lord, I have sinned, and I acknowledge mine iniquities: wherefore, I humbly beseech thee, forgive me, O Lord, forgive me, and destroy me not with mine iniquities. Be not angry with me forever, by reserving evil for me; neither condemn me to the lower parts of the earth.