

SOLOMON'S PRAYER

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The dedication of the Temple is one of the greatest moments in the entire Bible. Solomon recites a long prayer at a ceremony which was attended by the entire household of Israel, thousands of people. He is situated at the heart of the Temple compound, right in front of the Altar. From that

rostrum, he addresses the people *in a great voice*. His words deserve to be *heard* carefully. These are, after all, his last words to the convocation. As in all great oratory and poetry, these words conceal and reveal. The question is, what is he saying? And what do we hear? Some comments:

<p>ברוך ה' אשר נתן מנוחה לעמו ישראל ככל אשר דבר לא נפל דבר אחד מכל דבריו הטוב אשר דבר ביד משה עבדו.</p>	<p>Blessed is GOD, who has given rest to his people Israel, exactly as he promised; not one thing has failed of all his good words which he promised by the hand of Moshe his servant</p>	<p>Who has given rest. What rest? Rest from enemies. Rest from the unsettledness of a wandering sanctuary. Physical rest. Spiritual rest. Emotional rest. which he promised by the hand of Moshe his servant. At this great junction point of past and future, Solomon invokes Moses. He has invoked his father David many times throughout the course of the longer prayer that precedes this closing. It's interesting that he does not invoke David here. Only Moses. He is summoning the deep past.</p>
<p>יהי ה' אלהינו עמנו כאשר היה עם אבותינו אל יעזבנו ואל ישנונו.</p>	<p>May GOD our God be with us as he was with our fathers —may he not abandon us, may he not leave us!—</p>	<p>May GOD our God be with us. It's hard not to hear a hint of anxiety in these words. Fear of divine abandonment animates the entire Bible. Without God, the people are doomed. The Temple which he has just built reflects the profound desire to have God close to the people. But Solomon understands the paradox of a House for God very well. It is a house built for God, but God doesn't actually dwell there. Only God's name <i>dwells</i> there. Will God be with the people going forward?</p>
		<p>as he was with our fathers. Is Solomon aspiring to that status? He knows the accomplishments of his own father, and he possess a record of Moses' teaching. He has just completed the most important capital building project in Israel's history. Should he not have the status of a 'founder' as well? A prayer like this aspires to have that same kind of connection with God as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had. But, does he have that connection? We don't really know.</p>
<p>להטות לבבנו אליו ללכת בכל דרכיו ולשמר מצותיו וחקיו ומשפטי אשר צוה את אבותינו.</p>	<p>inclining our heart toward him to walk in all his ways and to keep all his commandments, his laws, and his judgments which he commanded our fathers.</p>	<p>our heart. Note that heart is singular, and the pronoun is in the first-person plural. Why doesn't he say our hearts? Because everyone is united at this moment. The people are one, and he is one with them, and God is One with them as well. But this moment is not going to last forever. And note also that he is speaking from the heart of the Temple. He is right at the center of the building and the center of the nation. He is praying that he, together with the people, always be inclined to walk in God's ways, and that the Temple itself, the heart of the people, always be oriented towards God.</p>
<p>ויהיו דברי אלה אשר התחננתי לפני ה' קרבים אל ה' אלהינו יומם ולילה לעשות משפט עבדו ומשפט עמו ישראל</p>	<p>And may these words of mine which I have pleaded in the presence of GOD be near to GOD our God, day and night, to render justice [for] his servant</p>	<p>And may these words of mine. This is a crucial moment. This is where Solomon puts himself into the prayer. In the prayer leading up to this closing benediction, he has invoked his father seven times as דוד אבי - my father David, and of those seven times, he refers to him דוד אבי - your servant my father David, three times. But David is absent from these final words. That's a big signal that Solomon has shifted the focus from his father to himself. On the one hand, how could he avoid it? He has to validate his own leadership, stature, and accomplishment. But on the other hand, he has taken a first step into the quicksand of making</p>

<p>דבר יום ביומו.</p>	<p><i>and justice [for] his people Israel, each day's need in its day,</i></p>	<p>this about him and not about the people. Notice that he wants these words to be near to God day and night as if God doesn't have anything else to worry about? And now, very subtly, he has elevated himself to servant status, a status that was reserved in this prayer up until now for only two other people: Moses and David. If they had a Mount Rushmore, this is the moment where he is saying, put my likeness on that mountain as well.</p>
<p>למען דעת כל עמי הארץ כי ה' הוא האלהים אין עוד.</p>	<p><i>in order for all the peoples of the earth to know that GOD, he is God, there is none else!</i></p>	<p>all the peoples of the earth to know... This is of course a noble sentiment. And a true sentiment. The construction of the Temple was a world historical event, its dedication was a singular moment in Israel's history. News of this moment must have reached well beyond the borders of the land of Israel. The purpose of the Temple is to announce to the world that GOD is God, and there is no one else. But who is making the announcement? Solomon. And therein lies the problem. The building has a function to be a vessel for God's name. But the people also has that purpose. God's name is made known to the world ultimately because of the people and their effectiveness at "bearing" the name of GOD, in the way they organize their society, administer justice, and conduct their lives with righteousness and modesty. What does a better job to publicize that GOD? A building that is organized around worshipping GOD? Or a people that is motivated by fulfilling GOD's word?</p>
<p>והיה לבבכם שלם עם ה' אלהינו ללכת בחקיו ולשמר מצותיו ביום הזה.</p>	<p><i>And may your heart be whole with GOD our God, to walk in his laws and to keep his commandments, as is this day!</i></p>	<p>And may your heart be whole. These are his last words. Note that he has taken himself out of the pronoun. It's no longer our heart but your heart. This is another crucial moment in the prayer. It conceals a deep personal brokenness. Notwithstanding his hubris, we have to acknowledge that he is still longing for his father, David, and that the sadness that his larger-than-life father has missed this great epoch-making milestone in the history of Israel, is lodged deep in his heart. But Solomon, the wisest man on earth, must also have been prescient enough to understand that once the Temple is dedicated, and goes into service, the building phase of his life is over, together with all of its excitement and purpose. Moses dies before crossing into the land; Solomon has got a lot of years ahead of him still. There is never going to be a moment like this again, neither for Israel, nor for him. But what is he going to do now? That question is enough to fragment anyone's heart. This is the moment that signals the inevitable detachment of King from the people that will take place at the conclusion of the dedication. As we read at the end of the chapter, when the holiday is over, the people go home, as they must, to resume their lives. They are happy, but Solomon knows that there will never be another moment like this. And so, we have to read this line with great pathos that a great crisis is in store for Solomon and the kingdom, but also with a promise as to how to offset that. By telling the people to keep God's commandments, Solomon prescribes the way to keeping your heart whole. And here we would add homiletically, that the observance of commandments brings moments of wholeness into a fragmented life. As is this day. He understands that this is THE DAY and that there</p>
 <p>Solomon Dedicates the Temple, Treasures of the Bible, Honey Dewspoint Northrop, 1894.</p>		
<p>חג שמחה!!</p>		

	<p>will be no other day like it. Let the wholeness of this day always be present in the days ahead. What else could he have prayed for?</p>
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