

A Joyful Journey Home, by Daniel H. Kuhn, Jr. 12090823
1 Kings 8:22-30, 41-43 and Psalm 84
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It feels good to be at home. I have a mother-in-law who loves to travel, but who even more, loves to return home. She loves her home more than anyone I know. Most of us love our homes because, well, they feel homey. Home is comfortable. Home is ours, whether we rent or own, or whether the bank owns it with us! A home is a place where one lives, a residence, but it is also a dwelling place together with a family or social unit that occupies it. The dictionary also defines a home as “an environment offering security and happiness,” or “A valued place regarded as a refuge”¹ The journey home is often joyful. We know we can relax and put our feet up. We can cozy in bed after a hard day’s work.

Solomon is the first one in our faith tradition who built a permanent house for God. The prayer was read as our first scripture lesson was the prayer of dedication that Solomon prayed after the temple was constructed. What a glorious day of celebration that was. All the people of Israel assembled. The priests and elders and Levites brought the ark of the Lord and the holy vessels that the Israelites had kept in a tent since the day four hundred eighty years before when they left Egypt. They sacrificed so many sheep and oxen that they could not be counted or numbered. Imagine the smoke and the smell! It was a huge barbeque!

The temple itself was magnificent. It was made of huge cut stones, laid in such a way that the beams to support the floors rested on the offset stones and not in holes cut into the stones. The roof and the beams were of cedar, cut in Lebanon and floated as barges on the ocean to the port of Jaffa and carried inland up to Jerusalem. The inside walls were lined with cedar paneling and it had flooring of cypress. The cedar paneling had carvings of gourds and flowers. The inner sanctuary was overlaid with pure gold.

Inside the temple there were two thirty-foot high cherubim with wings outspread to touch the walls and each other. Solomon had King Hiram of Tyre cast two huge pillars of bronze with bronze capitals. Hiram cast a huge bowl with its supports and ten stands with basins. The temple was fabulous. It brought joy to the citizenry. The psalmist wrote, “How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD of hosts! My soul longs, indeed it faints for the courts of the LORD; my heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God.”²

Solomon built this temple as the fulfillment of a promise made to his father David. Solomon also built the temple because it was politically expedient for him. With it, Solomon consolidated his power. Now, worship could be controlled in one place rather than allowing worship at the high places such as Gibeon, Hebron, Shiloh, or Gilgal. This magnificent temple became the “proper” place to worship.

There are some problems with houses and magnificent temples. Because we love them so much, we become attached to them. We protect them. Temples contribute to religious stiffness and rigidness. The temple became a home for the ark, the law, which literally petrified—became set in stone. When we try to put God into a home, we solidify things like doctrine. We set rules and decide who is acceptable and who is not.

Jesus taught us to resist rigid law. The word of God is a living and dynamic word. Today, in

¹The American Heritage Dictionary

²Psalm 84:1-2

the United Church of Christ, we say “God is still speaking!”

Another problem with houses and temples is that they do not last forever. My house has a deteriorating door and threshold that have to be repaired. On Monday, I noticed a pool of water in my front yard. I noted that it had not rained on Sunday. I asked Sue if she had been out watering the garden. She said “No.”

As I looked more closely, I noticed water bubbling up from the roots of a tree. Wow! A spring in the desert! No, this was not a natural phenomenon. We had to call a plumber to repair the water line running from the water meter into the house.

I am aware that there will come a day when Sue and I can no longer keep up a house and that we will have to move to a retirement or nursing home. Nothing in this life is permanent. Don’t get too attached to a home or a temple. The magnificent temple that Solomon constructed was destroyed by the Babylonians in 587 BCE. Some of the psalms and the book of Lamentations mourn the loss of the temple. A second temple was built, but it too, was destroyed by the Romans in 70 CE.

We shouldn’t get too attached to buildings. T. J. Liggett preached the sermon at my ordination forty years ago. The title of his sermon was, “At Home in a Tent.” His point was that I shouldn’t get too comfortable in any one place. None of us should get too attached to a place. God may call us at any moment to move on.

Solomon knew, when he prayed at the temple’s dedication, that it could not contain God. He dedicated the temple as the place where God’s *name* is.³ The building was to be a reminder of God’s sovereignty, and all people were to be welcomed there, even the foreigner. Solomon prayed, “Even heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, much less this house that I have built!”⁴

God, through the prophet Nathan, told David that God was content to be at home in a tent.⁵ We cannot entrap, we cannot limit God. Psalm 84 was a psalm for pilgrims on their way to the temple. The sense of the psalm is that our home is not a place. Our home is God. We are at home with God wherever we are. Even when we go through the valley of Baca, the valley of tears, we can make it a place of springs and pools of water.⁶

Our home in God is our place of security, comfort, and refuge. The home is not ours alone, however. God makes room and invites all to find peace and sanctuary. Solomon said that this home of God’s was open to the foreigner, so that all the peoples of earth may know God’s name. “Even the sparrow finds a home and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young.”⁷ Even the least and the tiniest find their home in God.

The psalmist reminds us that our whole life is a journey home to God. God beckons us onward, and God guides and accompanies us along life’s journey. It is a joyful journey home.

Let us pray: Journey with us, O God, and lead us to our true home, in and with you. Lead us with others, with whom we share that home’s grace and presence. Lead us with Spirit, who gives us strength and hope on the way. Lead us in Christ, who shows us the way. Amen.⁸

³1 Kings 8:29

⁴1 Kings 8:27

⁵2 Samuel 7:5-7

⁶Psalm 84:6

⁷Psalm 84:3

⁸*Seasons of the Spirit* August 23, 2009, Wood Lake Publishing, Inc.