

E100 Block 8:2 The Fall of Israel -- Part 2 Barrowby Only May 2011
1 Kings 8:1 -- 13 ; 2 Kings 25:1 -- 21

Introduction

The Fall of Israel Part 2 -- I chose those two passages to mark the two extreme points in the fortunes of Israel. The high point -- Solomon's building of the great temple in Jerusalem and this passage describing the dedication of the temple. That was approximately 950 BC. Then, around 360 years later in 587 BC the fall and destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians.

Let's look at the low point first.

The Low Point -- The End of the Kingdom

The Israelites had constantly turned away from God and broken their covenant with him, and despite warnings by the Prophets of what would happen if it did not turn back to God -- the Kingdom... was destroyed.

The northern kingdom of the 10 tribes of Israel had fallen to the Assyrians in 721 BC. The peoples of that land were taken away and, as was the custom of the Assyrians, were mixed with peoples from other conquered territories and dispersed among them. Hence we talk of the 10 lost tribes of Israel. They never came really back -- though they were to form the basis of that mixed-race people which the Jews of Jesus time so despised -- the Samaritans.

The two Southern tribes -- the kingdom of Judah survived that onslaught of the Assyrians but finally fell, a century and a half later, to the Babylonian empire in 587 BC -- as we read, Jerusalem was destroyed.

So is this the end of the dream.

What about God's promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob that he would make of their descendants a great nation? Where are they now? The nation is gone.

Well, yes... but also no.

God is still with his people and after 70 years in exile in Babylon he brings them back -- under Ezra and Nehemiah (read about it all in those books -- not in the E100)

Although they will never really have much of an earthly kingdom again -- they will always be conquered by Greeks or Romans -- yet God's people have learned their lesson -- they will not drift away and follow any other gods any more. Their law and their religion will be seen as something very special across the ancient world.

The scene is set -- but now there is a 4 century wait until the final and climatic stage of God's plan -- the coming of Jesus the Messiah, the King to establish his real kingdom on this earth.

The High Point -- Dedication of the Temple

At last week's royal wedding we saw Westminster Abbey in all its magnificence -- brilliant TV photography.

Solomon's Temple was an equally magnificent building. Not quite so large or high as Westminster Abbey -- but lavishly furnished. The interior walls were all lined with gold -- not gold paint but beaten sheets of Gold.

When the temple was finished Solomon held a great ceremony of dedication. -- read in 1 Kings chapter 8.

Before the ceremony, the last job to be done was to bring the ark of the covenant into the temple -- the chest which Moses had made to contain the 10 Commandments.

And we read that God's presence filled the temple -- verse 11 "the Lord's glory was in the cloud, and the light from it was so bright that the priests could not stay inside to do their work".

What makes our worship in church "come alive" -- it is not just how well the service goes -- it's how prepared and eager we are to meet with God.

When we come to church what do we come for? -- do we come for entertainment -- good music interesting readings and (dare I say it) sermon?

Do we come to meet up with friends and catch up news.

The main point of worship is to meet and experience God.

Of course we don't need to be in church to do that -- Solomon himself acknowledges in his dedication prayer that God is everywhere not just in one small building. But there's something special when Christians come together to meet God.

And there's something special when we come together, each one of us with the expectation of being with God.

Of course we can all experience God in different ways it doesn't have to be all singing, all dancing -- it can be in quiet meditative services as much as in "lively lively ones.

And we must be careful of just relying on our emotional responses.

Also some would make the point that worship is not about what we get from it in terms of spiritual experiences, but that worship is about what we give to God. We come to give him our Thanksgiving -- it is our duty as his people to do so.

Yes, but bearing that in mind, what a difference our attitude makes as we come to church.

What makes our worship in church "come alive" -- it is not just how well the service goes -- it's how prepared and eager we are to meet with God.

Do we come with an expectation that we shall meet the Lord's glory here (even if the only cloud is that going up from the coffee machine)

Is it a duty, or a mechanical procedure, or are we genuinely coming together to be with God's people to experience Him, and to encourage each other in walking before him.

Ask ourselves why do we think we are here, and what we expect to happen in this service.