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September 15th: 1 Kings 6 & Hebrews 5:11—6:20

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Solomon's Edenic building. The imperative of spiritual progress to maturity.

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

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Transcript

1 Kings 6. In the four hundred and eightieth year after the people of Israel came out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel, in the month of Ziv, which is the second month, he began to build the house of the Lord. The house that King Solomon built for the Lord was sixty cubits long, twenty cubits wide, and thirty cubits high. The vestibule in front of the nave of the house was twenty cubits long, equal to the width of the house, and ten cubits deep in front of the house.

And he made for the house windows with recessed frames. He also built a structure against the wall of the house, running around the walls of the house, both the nave and the inner sanctuary. And he made side chambers all around.

The lowest story was five cubits broad, the middle one was six cubits broad, and the third was seven cubits broad. For around the outside of the house he made offsets on the wall in order that the supporting beams should not be inserted into the walls of the

house. When the house was built, it was with stone prepared at the quarry, so that neither hammer nor axe nor any tool of iron was heard in the house while it was being built.

The entrance for the lowest story was on the south side of the house, and one went up by stairs to the middle story, and from the middle story to the third. So he built the house and finished it, and he made the ceiling of the house of beams and planks of cedar. He built the structure against the whole house, five cubits high, and it was joined to the house with timbers of cedar.

Now the word of the Lord came to Solomon, concerning this house that you are building, if you will walk in my statutes and obey my rules and keep all my commandments and walk in them, then I will establish my word with you, which I spoke to David your father, and I will dwell among the children of Israel and will not forsake my people Israel. So Solomon built the house and finished it. He lined the walls of the house on the inside with boards of cedar.

From the floor of the house to the walls of the ceiling he covered them on the inside with wood, and he covered the floor of the house with boards of cypress. He built twenty cubits of the rear of the house with boards of cedar from the floor to the walls, and he built this within as an inner sanctuary, as the most holy place. The house, that is the nave in front of the inner sanctuary, was forty cubits long.

The cedar within the house was carved in the form of gourds and open flowers. All was cedar, no stone was seen. The inner sanctuary he prepared in the innermost part of the house, to set there the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord.

The inner sanctuary was twenty cubits long, twenty cubits wide, and twenty cubits high, and he overlaid it with pure gold. He also overlaid an altar of cedar, and Solomon overlaid the inside of the house with pure gold, and he drew chains of gold across in front of the inner sanctuary and overlaid it with gold, and he overlaid the whole house with gold until all the house was finished. Also the whole altar that belonged to the inner sanctuary he overlaid with gold.

In the inner sanctuary he made two cherubim of olive wood, each ten cubits high. Five cubits was the length of one wing of the cherub, and five cubits the length of the other wing of the cherub. It was ten cubits from the tip of one wing to the tip of the other.

The other cherub also measured ten cubits. Both cherubim had the same measure and the same form. The height of one cherub was ten cubits, and so was that of the other cherub.

He put the cherubim in the innermost part of the house, and the wings of the cherubim were spread out so that a wing of one touched the one wall and a wing of the other

cherub touched the other wall. Their other wings touched each other in the middle of the house, and he overlaid the cherubim with gold. Around all the walls of the house he carved engraved figures of cherubim and palm trees and open flowers in the inner and outer rooms.

The floor of the house he overlaid with gold in the inner and outer rooms. For the entrance to the inner sanctuary he made doors of olive wood. The lintel and the doorposts were five-sided.

He covered the two doors of olive wood with carvings of cherubim, palm trees and open flowers. He overlaid them with gold, and spread gold on the cherubim and on the palm trees. So also he made for the entrance to the nave doorposts of olive wood, in the form of a square, and two doors of cypress wood.

The two leaves of the one door were folding, and the two leaves of the other door were folding. On them he carved cherubim and palm trees and open flowers, and he overlaid them with gold evenly applied on the carved work. He built the inner court with three courses of cut stone and one course of cedar beams.

In the fourth year the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid, in the month of Ziv. And in the eleventh year, in the month of Bul, which is the eighth month, the house was finished in all its parts, and according to all its specifications. He was seven years in building it.

In the four hundred and eightieth year after the Exodus Solomon began to build the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem. That the author of Kings should date the start of the building of the temple from the Exodus is noteworthy. In Exodus chapter fifteen verse seventeen, in Moses' song following the Red Sea, he declares, You will bring them in and plant them on your own mountain, the place, O Lord, which you have made for your abode, the sanctuary, O Lord, which your hands have established.

The building of the temple on the mountain in Jerusalem is in many respects the climax and the completion of the process begun in the Exodus. Within the early chapters of first Kings there are a number of references back to the Exodus, not least in first Kings chapter eight verse sixteen, where God mentions the Exodus as the starting point of the great period of history that is finally reaching its climax. Since the day that I brought my people Israel out of Egypt, I chose no city out of all the tribes of Israel in which to build a house, that my name might be there.

But I chose David to be over my people Israel. God's great deliverance of Israel in the Exodus is foundational for the Lord's continuing commitment to them as his people. The Exodus is also spoken of in connection with the Ark of the Covenant, which bears the two tablets of stone representing the covenant that was made at Sinai.

Finally, the Ark of the Covenant, which has moved around for centuries, will have a settled resting place. Since its construction, the tabernacle had functioned as a sort of portable Mount Sinai, an architectural extension of the theophany that occurred there. It was also a new Eden and a microcosmic representation of the wider creation.

We should note the presence of the creation pattern of Genesis one in the plans that are given for it. Solomon's temple introduces a new stage of history and once again there are echoes of the original creation and of Eden. Solomon builds the temple as if it were a new creation.

Like Noah, whose name means rest, Solomon's name, peace, has Sabbath connotations. After the wars and the struggles of the years of the judges of Saul and of David his father, Solomon was to preside over a glorious Sabbath rest to the land. We see this in 1 Kings 5 3-4.

Indeed, the completion of the temple around the 490th year, 7 times 70, after the Exodus, is suggestive of a great Jubilee. Sinai was connected with Pentecost, which is a mini-Jubilee. Around seven weeks after the Feast of Firstfruits, the trumpet was blown and the Lord declared the release of the captives.

The defeat of Jericho was another Jubilee titled, the First of the Seven. The completion of the temple around the 490th year is another such Jubilee event. It occurs after 70 weeks of years, a significant period in scriptural numerology.

In chapter 3 we see another Eden theme as Solomon requests the knowledge of good and evil from the Lord. While Adam and Eve grasped at wisdom prematurely, Solomon requests wisdom at the appropriate time and it is given to him by the Lord. Peter Lighthouse draws attention to the various creation and Eden themes in the building of the temple.

The repeated references to the completion of acts of construction in verse 9, 14, 38 and in the next chapter in verses 1 and 40 recall Genesis chapter 2 verses 1 to 3 and the Sabbath of the Lord after his construction of the world. Verse Kings chapter 7 verse 51 plays on Solomon's name and also recalls Sabbath themes when it speaks of all of Solomon's work being completed or Solomonized. There are many details suggestive of a fruitful, verdant and well-watered garden.

Pomegranates, open flowers, palm trees, lilies, cedars, olive wood and streams of water that move out. The two guarding cherubim figures in the inner room, the images of cherubim on the walls and at the doors and also the symbolic representation of cherubim by the two bronze pillars by the vestibule of the temple should all remind the reader of the cherubim set up as sentries at the entrance of the Garden of Eden in Genesis chapter 3 verse 24. Finally, the building of the temple, a building with a face, ribs and shoulders which we see in verse 3, 5 to 8 and then in chapter 7 verse 39 all recall the building of

Eve from Adam's rib in Genesis chapter 2. The temple is an architectural representation of the bride that Solomon brings to the Lord.

It is also to be, like Eden, a sanctuary where God would be especially present and into which the riches of the nations would come. Within this world, Solomon is like a glorious new Adam. He is the wise ruler of the world who is able to name the trees and the animals.

The story of Solomon in 1 Kings is structured in a way that focuses upon the construction and the completion of this building. It is the point where the kingdom reaches its zenith. The temple is like the tabernacle in many respects, yet an elevation of it to a new and more glorious level.

The tabernacle was 10 cubits by 30 cubits, with the Holy of Holies being a 10 cubits cube. The temple multiplies most of these dimensions by 2. It is 20 cubits by 60 cubits with a height of 30 cubits. The inner sanctuary is a 20 cubits cube.

In place of the temporary and the light character of the tabernacle, the temple of Solomon is weighty and glorious. All this was received in the patent that the Lord gave to David. The elevation of the glory of the building can also be seen in such things as the presence of 4 cherubim instead of 2 in the inner sanctuary.

We might also see the connections with the Ark of the Covenant in the building itself. Now you have a measured wooden box overlaid with gold. It is a sort of an expansion of the glory of the Ark of the Covenant out to include the whole structure of the temple.

The glory of the temple will spread out. The entire building now takes on something of the character of the Ark of the Covenant. And the whole city will be affected by the presence of the temple in its midst.

It will become the Holy City. A question to consider. What might be some of the significance of the words of the Lord to Solomon in verses 11 to 13? Hebrews 5 verse 11 to chapter 6 verse 20.

About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child.

But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil. Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ, and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. And this we will do, if God permits.

For it is impossible in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God, and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm, and holding him up to contempt. For lamb that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned.

Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things, things that belong to salvation. For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work, and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do. And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, saying, Surely I will bless you and multiply you. And thus Abraham, having patiently waited, obtained the promise. For people swear by something greater than themselves, and in all their disputes an oath is final for confirmation.

So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath, so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us. We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. It may seem as if the author of Hebrews has been taking us into rich territory of biblical insight, yet he feels keenly the limitations of his hearers.

He wants to take them so much further, but he just isn't sure that they are ready for such advanced teaching. They still don't seem to have grasped many of the basics. He remarks upon the poor progress of his hearers at the end of chapter 5. They are unskilled and childlike.

They lack the necessary capacity both to digest solid food, or the powers of discernment required of healthy eaters, who are active in discriminating and determining what they take in. One can perhaps imagine the author of Hebrews saying all of this with a slight twinkle in his eye. By presenting the teaching that he wishes to give them as beyond their capacity and level of maturity, they will be provoked to protest that they are ready.

Had he simply ploughed on into it, they might have grumbled that his teaching was too difficult and challenging. However, now they have been given something to prove, and

will be eager to pay closer attention. Within this, we should also recognize the emphasis that the author of Hebrews, along with the other New Testament authors, places upon advancing Christians in their understanding, always pushing them to the next level.

The author of Hebrews is concerned that his hearers are at the point where they can understand complicated and challenging teachings about Old Testament symbolism, narrative and typology. Wisdom involves the knowledge of good and evil, the ability to discern between these things. The wise person has moved beyond the basics of pre-digested food, and they are able to test things for themselves.

They are active learners, committed to growing in their own knowledge, having learnt some of the skills by which one can discern the difference between truth and error, and feeding themselves consistently. Having needled his hearers by suggesting that they are not yet prepared to advance in their study of the Christian faith, the author of Hebrews hopes to provoke them to try to prove him wrong. Verse 1 of chapter 6 presumes that, after such a challenge, the hearers will be eager to progress.

OK then, let's move forward. They should leave the basic classes behind, not having forgotten or abandoned their lessons, but moving on to the more advanced classes, in which the fundamentals are far more developed. They are moving forward to perfection or maturity, the same thing that Christ attained to through his sufferings in chapter 2 verse 10 and 5 verse 9. What are the most fundamental teachings, or the elementary doctrine of Christ? The list might be divided into three pairs, repentance and faith, baptisms and the laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment.

Repentance is repentance from dead works, or from works that lead to death. The dead works are almost certainly not works done to attempt to earn salvation, but rather sinful works that have death and judgment as their natural harvest. Repentance involves turning away from such things, and having turned away from them, we turn towards God and faith.

Faith is the counterpart of repentance. Instruction about washings, or literally baptisms, refers to the instruction concerning the meaning of Christian baptism, quite possibly in its relationship to other baptisms, such as the baptisms of the priests in the Old Testament, the baptism of John and other ritual washings. The laying on of hands is another ritual action of importance in appointment to office, in blessing, in healing, and also in connection with baptism.

It is probably on account of its relationship to baptism that it is mentioned here. The resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment are the final foundational teachings that the author of Hebrews lists. These concern the last things.

At the end, the dead will be raised and will face final judgment. The judgment is eternal.

Its outcomes, positive or negative, will be both final and enduring.

The list of fundamental doctrines that he gives here might be a little surprising. They have a more practical weight to them. They concern how we are personally to respond to the message of Christ, how we are initiated into Christian community, and the horizon to which we must live.

The author wants to take his hearers beyond the basics, and trusts that God will make his teaching effective in this regard. He is deeply concerned for their progress in no small measure, because standing still is not an option. Those who are not progressing are in real danger of falling away.

He is exhorting them to continued growth, expecting that they will heed him. However, his exhortation consists not merely of encouragements and promises, but also of very serious and grave warnings. Although these warnings are framed in a more generic fashion, not addressed to any particular group of or among the hearers of the book, and the author is confident that his hearers will respond appropriately, the warnings are not empty ones.

Indeed, I believe that they refer to a specific group of people especially. The language is the language of Christian experience, but I suspect that he is here referring to the unbelieving Jews of that generation and previous generations, who opposed the gospel and rejected Christ. He is earlier spoken of people who received the good news, as those who were in the wilderness led by Moses.

They had a similar sort of experience, but they did not respond by faith. The apostle Paul does a similar thing in 1 Corinthians 10, verses 1-4. For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink.

For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ. The purpose of such a way of speaking is to get Christians to recognize the similarities between them and the children of Israel who were led by Moses into the wilderness. He had already been doing this in chapters 3 and 4. Once they recognize the similarities, they will be warned about any presumption that they might have, appreciating that such great gifts can be forfeited by those who respond to God's immense goodness with unbelief.

The children of Israel were once enlightened. They had the fire of God's presence in their midst. They were led through the waters and declared to be God's own people.

God lighted their way both physically and spiritually. They tasted the heavenly gift. As Paul puts it, they ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink.

They participated in Christ himself. They shared in the Holy Spirit. Isaiah chapter 63 verse 11 speaks of the Lord placing His Holy Spirit in the midst of the people of Israel when He brought them out of Egypt.

There are similar claims in Israel's national confession of sin in Nehemiah chapter 9. For instance, in verses 19-20, they had experienced His might over creation, in judgment, and healing, in the plagues of Egypt, and in the miraculous provision of the wilderness. However, even after first-hand experience of all of these things, an experience also shared by many non-believing Jews with first-hand experience of the ministry of Christ, they still rejected the word of the Lord and fell in the wilderness. At such a point, after they had experienced so much, yet determinedly hardened their hearts, and what is more, rejected such a great salvation so decisively, there was no remaining hope for them.

They were condemned to destruction, and they perished, their bodies falling in the wilderness. Christ was once crucified, made an open shame before others. For the author of Hebrews, it is as if those who reject the gospel are inflicting a sort of a second crucifixion upon Christ, if that were indeed possible, holding Him up for shame to the world, and cutting Him off from themselves.

However, they are the ones who will lose out, they are doing this to their harm. The author of Hebrews describes such a situation by contrasting land that is well-watered and responds with fruitfulness in a good crop, to that land if it bears thorns or thistles. It is the same land, but two different potential responses.

It seems to me that he is here referring to the poor response of Israel to the many blessings of God over the centuries, and to the fact that the judgment of God is about to fall upon it. Behind this might lie Old Testament passages such as Isaiah chapter 5 and its Song of the Vineyard. The point of this is that the recipients of the book ought to see a cautionary resemblance between themselves and the people of Moses who failed in the wilderness.

If they are careless, they could fail too. Beyond this, however, they face the temptation of falling back into the unbelieving Judaism that they left behind. However, that unbelieving Judaism was doomed on account of its unbelief.

It had experienced all of these blessings, yet persisted in its unbelief. There was no hope of salvation to be found there. However, the author does not believe that the judgment awaiting the unbelieving Jews awaits those to whom he is writing.

All of the signs in their case point in a far more promising direction. To this point, they have manifested commitment and fruitfulness in their faith and love, and they continue to do so. Yet they should beware of complacency or presumption at this point.

They must earnestly press forward, grasping hold ever more firmly of the promised reality that they await. The more sure their grip upon that, the more prepared that they will be to persevere, inheriting the promises in the end. Perseverance, for the author of Hebrews, is related to our grasping hold of God's promises, and people can be strengthened in their perseverance as they are assured of the strength and the surety of God's promises.

He ends this chapter by directing their attention to the power of God's promise. Not only did God make a promise, which he would not lie about or renege upon, he also accompanied the promise with a vow, swearing by himself, to give us two things of certainty that we can rest upon. For the author of Hebrews, the sure and certain promise of God is like an anchor, which through Jesus has been placed in heaven itself.

We are able to cling onto a promise that is attached to God's very throne. Christ's high priestly status assures us in all of this. He is the high priest who has gone ahead of us, into God's holy presence, into the heavenly realm that corresponds to the Holy of Holies.

A question to consider. What lessons about Christian growth might we learn from this passage?