

March 18  
Lesson 3 (NIV)

# THE PEOPLE GAVE THANKS TO GOD

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 138  
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: 2 Chronicles 7:1-11

## 2 CHRONICLES 7:1-9

<sup>1</sup> When Solomon finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the LORD filled the temple. <sup>2</sup> The priests could not enter the temple of the LORD because the glory of the LORD filled it. <sup>3</sup> When all the Israelites saw the fire coming down and the glory of the LORD above the temple, they knelt on the pavement with their faces to the ground, and they worshiped and gave thanks to the LORD, saying,

“He is good;  
his love endures forever.”

<sup>4</sup> Then the king and all the people offered sacrifices before the LORD. <sup>5</sup> And King Solomon offered a sacrifice of twenty-two thousand head of cattle and a hundred and twenty thousand sheep and goats. So the king and all the people dedicated the temple of God. <sup>6</sup> The priests took their positions, as did the Levites with the LORD’s musical instruments, which King David had made for praising the LORD and which were used when he gave thanks, saying, “His love endures forever.” Opposite the Levites, the priests blew their trumpets, and all the Israelites were standing.

<sup>7</sup> Solomon consecrated the middle part of the courtyard in front of the temple of the LORD, and there he offered burnt offerings and the fat of the fellowship offerings, because the bronze altar he had made could not hold the burnt offerings, the grain offerings and the fat portions.

<sup>8</sup> So Solomon observed the festival at that time for seven days, and all Israel with him—a vast assembly, people from Lebo Hamath to the Wadi of Egypt. <sup>9</sup> On the eighth day they held an assembly, for they had celebrated the dedication of the altar for seven days and the festival for seven days more.



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## KEY VERSE

*When all the Israelites saw the fire coming down and the glory of the LORD above the temple, they knelt on the pavement with their faces to the ground, and they worshiped and gave thanks to the LORD, saying, “He is good; his love endures forever.”—2 Chronicles 7:3*

## LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Describe God’s response to Solomon’s prayer of dedication at the temple and how Solomon and the people gave thanks to God.
2. Explain why giving thanks to God receives the emphasis it does in today’s passage.

3. Suggest one specific way to make giving thanks a consistent part of his or her daily walk.

## LESSON OUTLINE

### Introduction

- A. The “Write” Advice
- B. Lesson Background

### I. Fire from God (2 CHRONICLES 7:1-3)

- A. Glory Comes Down (vv. 1, 2)
- B. People Bow Down (v. 3)

### II. Worship by People (2 CHRONICLES 7:4-6)

- A. Their Sacrifices (vv. 4, 5)  
*How Much Is “Too Much”?*
- B. Their Music (v. 6)

### III. Further Actions (2 CHRONICLES 7:7-9)

- A. Many Offerings (v. 7)
- B. Many Worshipers (vv. 8, 9)  
*A King Above All Others*

### Conclusion

- A. *Semper Gratus*
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

## Introduction

### A. The “Write” Advice

When our son graduated from college in June of 2011, the school’s president addressed the class as was customary. The content was pretty typical fare for a graduation speech, and I couldn’t tell you much of what he said that day. But I have never forgotten one piece of advice the president offered those graduates: they should write a thank-you note to each person who gave them a graduation present.

He went on to emphasize the need for *handwritten* notes. He urged the graduates not to send thank-you cards having preprinted messages; graduates should instead write personal messages of thanks, no matter how small the gift. To my recollection, I have not heard such advice in any other graduation ceremony I have attended before or since.

A prominent reminder to God’s people throughout Scripture is to be thankful. The Psalms include many such exhortations ([Psalm 95:2](#); [100:4](#); [116:17](#)), as does the New Testament ([Ephesians 5:20](#); [Philippians 4:6](#); [Colossians 2:7](#)). As Paul told the Thessalonians, “Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus” ([1 Thessalonians 5:18](#)).

In today’s lesson we see the important role that giving thanks played in celebrating the dedication of Solomon’s temple. The nation of Israel observed not just a day of thanksgiving (as is commonly done in countries such as the United States and Canada) but a celebration that spanned two weeks ([2 Chronicles 7:8-10](#))!

### B. Lesson Background

The background for last week’s lesson on Solomon’s dedicatory prayer also applies to this week’s lesson, so that information need not be repeated here. The conclusion to Solomon’s eloquent prayer, which immediately precedes today’s lesson text, is of such power that its wording is also closely reflected in a psalm:

“Arise, Lord, and come to your resting place, you and the ark of your might. May your priests be clothed with your righteousness; may your faithful people sing for joy.”  
For the sake of your servant David, do not reject your anointed one.

—[Psalm 132:8-10](#)

Now arise, Lord God, and come to your resting place, you and the ark of your might. May your priests, Lord God, be clothed with salvation, may your faithful people rejoice in your goodness. Lord God, do not reject your anointed one. Remember the great love promised to David your servant.

—[2 Chronicles 6:41, 42](#)

## I. Fire from God

(2 CHRONICLES 7:1-3)

### A. Glory Comes Down (vv. 1, 2)

**<sup>1a</sup>. When Solomon finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices,**

Solomon had concluded his dedicatory prayer with the plea that the Lord would “arise” and come to his “resting place” (see above). The immediately ensuing *fire . . . from heaven* is dramatic evidence that the Lord is pleased with the sentiment.

As the ark of the covenant was brought into the temple, so many sacrifices had been offered that it became impossible to keep track of their number ([2 Chronicles 5:5, 6](#)). What is *consumed* after the completion of Solomon’s prayer is apparently whatever remains on the altar at this point.

The scene reminds us somewhat of the confrontation that occurs later between Elijah and the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel (see [1 Kings 18:38](#)). Similar

demonstrations of heavenly fire associated with an altar had also accompanied the dedication of the tabernacle ([Leviticus 9:23, 24](#)) and David's offering prepared on a threshing floor to stop a plague sent upon the people of Israel ([1 Chronicles 21:14-27](#)). In each case, fire signifies God's acceptance of the offerings given. So it is with the fire that consumes Solomon's sacrifices.

## HOW TO SAY IT

Asaph *Ay-saff*.  
 Baal *Bay-ul*.  
 Elijah *Ec-lye-juh*.  
 Ephesians *Ec-fee-zhunz*.  
 Lebo Hamath *Leh-bow Hay-math*.  
 Levites *Lee-vites*.  
 Leviticus *Leh-vit-ih-kus*.  
 Orontes *Awe-rahnt-eez*.  
 Philippians *Fih-lip-ee-unz*.  
 tabernacle ***tah***-burr-nah-kul.  
 Thessalonians *Thess-uh-lo-nec-unz*  
 (*th* as in *thin*).

### **1b. and the glory of the LORD filled the temple.**

The phrasing here is virtually identical to that found in [2 Chronicles 5:14](#) (see the [Lesson Background](#) of lesson 2, page 243). It also echoes what took place when the assembling of the tabernacle was completed ([Exodus 40:34, 35](#)). God's blessing upon and approval of Solomon's temple is obvious to all present.

#### *What Do You Think?*

As a congregation, how can we know when our sensing of God presence is genuine?

#### *Talking Points for Your Discussion*

- Regarding his love
- Regarding his correction
- Other

### **2. The priests could not enter the temple of the LORD because the glory of the LORD filled it.**

This too is exactly what transpired at the completion of the tabernacle. On that occasion Moses was not able to enter that structure because of the overwhelming presence of *the glory of the Lord*. Neither could *the priests* conduct their ministry when the ark of the covenant was brought into the temple due to the overwhelming nature of the sacred presence ([2 Chronicles 5:14](#)).

## B. People Bow Down (v. 3)

### **3a. When all the Israelites saw the fire coming down and the glory of the LORD above the temple, they knelt on the pavement with their faces to the ground, and they worshiped and gave thanks to the LORD,**

The immediate response of *all the Israelites* befits such a display of Heaven-sent power. This response also calls to mind the people's reaction at the dedication of the tabernacle when fire came forth and consumed the sacrifices on the altar ([Leviticus 9:24](#)). A similar outpouring of praise will occur much later following the descent of heavenly fire in answer to Elijah's prayer on Mount Carmel ([1 Kings 18:39](#)).

### **3b. saying, "He is good; his love endures forever."**

The words the people utter in praise were also voiced when the ark of the covenant was placed within the temple ([2 Chronicles 5:13](#)). This refrain is in fact an integral part of Israelite worship within the Old Testament record. "David first appointed Asaph and his associates to give praise to the Lord in this manner" for use as part of the worship ceremony that accompanied bringing the ark of the covenant into Jerusalem ([1 Chronicles 16:7, 34](#)).

That the refrain became a kind of worship standard is indicated later in [1 Chronicles 16](#) where a list of names is included, designating those responsible for various matters of temple worship. [Verse 41](#) records that all these individuals were chosen "to give thanks to the Lord, 'for his love endures forever.'"

This refrain is also found in [Psalms 100, 106, 107, 118, and 136](#). Each of the latter's 26 verses concludes with the refrain. Furthermore, when the prophet Jeremiah pictures the return of God's people to Jerusalem from captivity, he describes them using these very words in celebrating their return ([Jeremiah 33:10, 11](#)). And when God's people do return and lay the foundation of the second temple, the words of this refrain form part of their grateful worship ([Ezra 3:10, 11](#)). All in all, this refrain occurs about 40 times in the Old Testament.

#### *What Do You Think?*

What changes might we experience by being more mindful of God's goodness, mercy, and love? Why?

#### *Talking Points for Your Discussion*

- In our families
- In our churches
- In our workplace
- Personally

## II. Worship by People

(2 CHRONICLES 7:4-6)

### A. Their Sacrifices (vv. 4, 5)

#### 4 Then the king and all the people offered sacrifices before the LORD.

Now come the actions of worship that follow the posture and words of worship of the previous verse. It should be highlighted that both *king* and *people* take part in this. In other nations of the ancient Near East, the king is commonly viewed as a deity to whom worship is offered. Solomon understands his proper place in this ceremony; he is just as much a worshipper as any member of the common people.

#### 5 And King Solomon offered a sacrifice of twenty-two thousand head of cattle and a hundred and twenty thousand sheep and goats. So the king and all the people dedicated the temple of God.

When the ark of the covenant had been carried into the temple, so many sheep and oxen were sacrificed that it was impossible to keep count (2 Chronicles 5:6). Numbers of animals *offered* in the current instance are given, and the figures are staggering to consider. The sacrifice of 22,000 *head of cattle* and 120,000 *sheep and goats* dwarfs those of later reform celebrations in 2 Chronicles 29:32; 30:24; 35:7-9.

#### What Do You Think?

What steps can we take to better express our reverence and thanks to God?

#### Talking Points for Your Discussion

- In worship
- In prayers
- In conversation
- Other

Some claim that such numbers cannot be taken literally, estimating that the slaughter of 142,000 animals would require 20 sacrifices per minute for 10 hours a day for 12 straight days. So the figures are said to reflect an enormous number but need not be considered an actual, literal count. However, see comments on [verse 7](#), below.

Later the Lord appears to Solomon and tells him, “I have heard your prayer and have chosen this place for myself as a temple for sacrifices” (2 Chronicles 7:12; see [lesson 4](#)). The temple’s function as a house for sacrifice is certainly being fulfilled on this memorable dedication ceremony!

### HOW MUCH IS “TOO MUCH”?

“The biggest party on earth” is how the Shah of Iran described the gala he had planned for 1971. The party was to celebrate the 2,500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Persian Empire by Cyrus the Great (note [Ezra 1:2](#)). Ecstatic because of his role in the event, the Shah designated himself *Shahanshah*—“King of Kings.”

In October 1971, the world’s political elite came to Iran to observe the Shah’s attempt to show how his reign replicated the greatness of the ancient kingdom. A colossal tent city made of silk was erected for the occasion. Eighteen tons of food and as many as 25,000 bottles of wine and liquor were flown in. Six hundred guests dined for more than five hours. It was a truly grand occasion, the epitome of *excess*. But the Shah found himself in exile a few years later, replaced by an Islamic dictatorship. The excesses of his lifestyle played a significant part in bringing him down.

The abundance of sacrifices Solomon brought to the temple dedication can be seen in a different light: they were intended to glorify God for his goodness to Israel. These sacrifices constituted the epitome of true worship. They were offered to exalt a gracious God whose “love endures forever.” Is that why you give back to the Lord?

—C. R. B.

### B. Their Music (v. 6)

#### 6 The priests took their positions, as did the Levites with the LORD’s musical instruments, which King David had made for praising the LORD and which were used when he gave thanks, saying, “His love endures forever.” Opposite the Levites, the priests blew their trumpets, and all the Israelites were standing.

Worship through music is an integral part of the ceremony. The mention of *David* is noteworthy. Though David was not permitted to build the temple, he was allowed to make “extensive preparations” for the project (1 Chronicles 22:5). Part of that preparation was organizing the ministry of worship through music, which was very close to David’s heart. [Second Samuel 23:1](#) refers to him as “the hero of Israel’s songs.” The fact that *King David had made certain musical instruments* to use in worship *for praising the Lord* fits well with his own status as a musician (see [1 Samuel 16:23](#); [2 Samuel 6:5](#)). These skills form the backdrop of David’s expertise in organizing the music ministry during his reign ([1 Chronicles 16:4-7](#); [25:1-7](#)).

#### What Do You Think?

What are some ways we can ascribe worthiness to God?

#### Talking Points for Your Discussion

- In good times
- In hard times

## III. Further Actions

(2 CHRONICLES 7:7-9)

## A. Many Offerings (v. 7)

**7. Solomon consecrated the middle part of the courtyard in front of the temple of the LORD, and there he offered burnt offerings and the fat of the fellowship offerings, because the bronze altar he had made could not hold the burnt offerings, the grain offerings and the fat portions.**

Here we see how the numbers of [2 Chronicles 7:5](#) can be taken literally: Solomon has *consecrated* (dedicated) additional sacred space for the various sacrifices of the occasion. In addition, the entire ceremony of dedication lasts two weeks (see further on [7:9](#)). Thus, while the task of offering the sacrifices requires a significant effort from the priests and Levites present, the numbers of the sacrificial animals do not need to be interpreted in any way other than literally.

The types of offerings noted reflect the totality of the people's worship and devotion to God. Usually *burnt offerings* (described in [Leviticus 1](#)) address issues of sin or of dedication to the Lord. The *grain offerings* will include the offering of the choice part of the grain as opposed to the worthless chaff (compare [Leviticus 2:14](#); [Isaiah 62:8](#)). These offerings symbolize thanksgiving, and the regulations for presenting them are found in [Leviticus 2](#). The *fellowship offerings* are the only offerings in which some of it may be eaten by the worshipper and the priest ([Leviticus 3](#); [7:11-18](#)); the *fat* of such offerings is to be presented only to the Lord ([3:16, 17](#)).

The phrase *the bronze altar [Solomon] had made* is not to be understood as indicating that the king has dreamed up his own ad hoc addition to the temple furnishings. This altar was part of the original design for the tabernacle (the precursor to the temple), as noted in [Exodus 27:1-8](#); [38:1-7](#). Solomon *made* this altar in the sense that he authorized its size be scaled up to match the larger size of the temple ([2 Chronicles 4:1](#)). Even given its larger size, however, it *could not hold* the various offerings, so numerous are they.

### What Do You Think?

What preparations can we undertake in order to make an extravagant sacrifice to God?

### Talking Points for Your Discussion

Considering the three Ts of "time, talent, and treasure"

Considering the sacrifice as a visible witness ([Matthew 5:12-16](#); [26:6-13](#)) vs. the need for discreetness ([Matthew 6:1-4](#))

## B. Many Worshipers (vv. 8, 9)

**8. So Solomon observed the festival at that time for seven days, and all Israel with him—a vast assembly, people from Lebo Hamath to the Wadi of Egypt.**

The *festival* alluded to here is the Festival of Tabernacles, or Booths (also known as Ingathering). We know this because of the reference in [2 Chronicles 7:10](#) to "the seventh month," which is the month when this festival is to be observed for a period of *seven days* ([Leviticus 23:33-36, 39-43](#); compare [2 Chronicles 5:3](#)). Its purpose is to recognize the harvest provided by the Lord. Thus, the dedication of the temple (for which the people are gathered to give thanks) occurs adjacent to a festival already on the Israelite calendar, a festival already set aside for giving thanks to God.

The sense of unity and support for Solomon's undertaking is clear from both the number of worshippers and the distances they travel: *from Lebo Hamath to the Wadi of Egypt*. Hamath is a city located in upper Syria on the Orontes River. The *Wadi of Egypt* most likely refers to the stream of water known as the Wadi el Arish, which is situated on the southwestern border of Palestine and flows into the Mediterranean Sea.

These boundaries are significant in that they reflect God's intention as to the territory that his people should possess ([Numbers 34:5-8](#)). Hamath designates the northernmost point; the Wadi el Arish marks the southernmost point. The people gathered on this day could celebrate not only the achievement of building a temple but also the building of a great nation in fulfillment of the promise to Abraham ([Genesis 12:1-3](#); [1 Kings 4:21, 24](#)). Neither could have happened without the Lord's blessing.

### A KING ABOVE ALL OTHERS

Over two dozen nations today require their heads of state to belong to a particular religion. Several other nations have religious requirements for their ceremonial monarchs. For example, Queen Elizabeth II's role in that regard is "Supreme Governor of the Church of England and Defender of the Faith" for the British Commonwealth of Nations.

These traditions can be traced to biblical times. Solomon, king of Israel, is an example. So are the Herods of the New Testament. Centuries later, King Henry VIII of England demonstrated how a monarch may provide questionable spiritual leadership. Henry's maneuverings to be granted a divorce resulted in his receiving one from a religious authority that he himself had created—not the best of spiritual examples for his people.

Solomon, by contrast, did set an appropriate example as he led in worship of the Lord. However, the history of God's people in the Old Testament demonstrates that no matter how devout leaders may be, we do well not to place too much faith in them. Saul, David, Solomon, and their successors prove the point. In Jesus we have a king who will never lead us astray. Although we are to honor earthly authorities ([1 Peter 2:17](#)), our ultimate allegiance must be only to him.

—C. R. B.

**9. On the eighth day they held an assembly, for they had celebrated the dedication of the altar for seven days and the festival for seven days more.**

The Law of Moses stipulates that the Festival of Tabernacles lasts *seven days*, beginning the fifteenth day of the seventh month ([Leviticus 23:33, 34](#)). Since the people are sent home on the twenty-third day of this month ([2 Chronicles 7:10](#)), the dedication of the temple lasts seven days followed by the seven-day observance of the Festival of Tabernacles.

The *assembly on the eighth day* concludes both the gathering for the dedication of the temple and the Festival of Tabernacles ([Leviticus 23:36b](#); [Numbers 29:35-38](#)). That the *dedication of the altar* is specifically noted is perhaps in keeping with the temple's purpose as a sacred place for sacrifices to be offered ([2 Chronicles 7:12](#)).

[Verse 10](#), though not in our lesson text, describes the conclusion of what must have been an uplifting time of praise and worship. The people leave "joyful and glad in heart for the good things the Lord had done for David and Solomon and for his people Israel." Once more the important role of David is highlighted. What has transpired on this momentous day marks the fulfillment of part of God's covenant with David. Both his son Solomon and the entire nation of Israel are the



beneficiaries of God's faithfulness, and they acknowledge that truth as they depart from this memorable celebration to return home.

## Conclusion

### A. *Semper Gratus*

Many will recognize the words *Semper Fidelis* as the motto of the United States Marine Corps. The phrase means "always faithful" and highlights the unwavering devotion to duty and country that those in the Marines have exhibited consistently throughout their history. In thinking about the theme of today's lesson, perhaps the phrase *Semper Gratus*, meaning "always grateful," is appropriate. This is a motto for Christians to live by in recognition of God's love. Of that love we can say, as the worshippers at the temple dedication proclaimed, it "endures forever." It doesn't hurt to note again Paul's exhortation to "give thanks in all circumstances" ([1 Thessalonians 5:18](#)).

# DEDICATION



What a singer thinks it is



What a builder thinks it is



# What God thinks

Visual for Lesson 3. Point to the various images as you ask, "What are the different senses of the words dedication and dedicated?"

We should keep in mind that those words came from someone whose surroundings were often less than comfortable or carefree. Earlier in that same epistle,

Paul referred to the suffering and shameful treatment that he and his companions had experienced while preaching the gospel (1 [Thessalonians 2:1, 2](#)). He even writes of Christians being “destined” for such treatment ([3:3](#)).

Yet Paul did not allow such situations to shake his spirit or cloud his view of the Lord’s love for him. His motto could have been *Semper Gratus*. May it be ours as well.

### B. Prayer

Father, may our worship include every part of our lives—thoughts, words, deeds, and will. Help us to live as thankful people in the midst of a broken and often cynical world. Let us dedicate anew, with no less resolve and sincerity than Solomon, the temples of our bodies to your service. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

### C. Thought to Remember

Give thanks and live thanks—daily.

## INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

Enhance your lesson with NIV® Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at [www.standardlesson.com](http://www.standardlesson.com) or in the back of the NIV® Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

### Into the Lesson

Write the word *DEDICATION* on the board. Then divide the class into two groups, giving each a paper and a pen. At your signal, groups should use the letters in the word *DEDICATION* to create as many different words as they can (*edict, noted, code*, etc.). Allow several minutes for groups to work. Let groups read their lists, crossing out words that have been duplicated by the other team. The group with the most unique words wins. Talk about what dedication means (as related to reaching a goal) and then about what a ceremonial dedication symbolizes.

*Alternative.* Make one copy of the “To the One I Love” activity from the reproducible page, which you can download. Have class members decide which of the dedications found there come from actual books. Discuss the purpose of book dedications and other ceremonial tributes.

After either activity say, “We like to celebrate when a project is completed. Can those celebrations be times of worship? As Solomon and the people of Israel dedicated the temple, they did just that.”

### Into the Word

Lead into the Bible study by saying, “Solomon had finished building the temple, where God’s people would worship. God had promised to live among his people in this special place—and Solomon trusted in that promise.” Invite a volunteer to read aloud Solomon’s prayer in [2 Chronicles 6:41, 42](#).

Read aloud [2 Chronicles 7:1](#). Say, “When Solomon finished praying, God sent fire from Heaven as a sign that he was keeping his promise.” Divide students into three groups, giving each group a sheet of paper and a marker. Assign one of the following passages to each group: [verses 2, 3](#); [verses 4-7](#); [verses 8, 9](#). Challenge each group to read its passage and create a sign that summarizes its message. (For example, a group could summarize [verses 2, 3](#) by creating a “Do Not Enter” sign to reflect the fact that the priests could not enter the temple because it was filled with the glory of the Lord. A group could summarize [verses 4-7](#) by creating a “Yield” sign to reflect the sacrifices that Solomon and the people surrendered to God. A group could summarize [verses 8, 9](#) by creating a “Festival Parking Only” sign to reflect the celebrations that occurred.) Guide groups as needed and encourage them to be creative!

*Option.* If laptop computers are available, allow groups to design their signs using PowerPoint or other software.

After several minutes, ask each group to read aloud its passage and explain its sign to the class. Invite volunteers to suggest ideas for other possible signs, and briefly discuss each passage. Focus on the reverent worship, generous sacrifice, and eager celebration that marked the temple dedication.

Conclude by saying, “People celebrate things that are important to them. How can their celebrations become a form of worship? As they dedicated the temple, Solomon and the people worshipped the Lord by kneeling with their faces to the ground, making burnt offerings, playing music, and praying. We can honor and thank God during important times in our lives as well.”

### Into Life

Challenge students to think of something they would like to dedicate to God (their lives, their families, your congregation, etc.). As a group, discuss a potential dedication service: How could worship be incorporated? What offering(s) could be given? What song(s) could be played or sung? What would be prayed?

*Alternative.* Make copies of the “My Dedication” activity from the reproducible page. Let students work individually to finish the sentences and make private dedications to God.