SERMON TRANSCRIPT

Holy Fire

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Holy Fire | November 1, 2026 | James 4:8; Deuteronomy 4:24; 2 Chronicles 7:1-3; 2 Samuel 7:1-2; Hebrews 12:29; 1 Chronicles 21; Exodus 25:8-9; Exodus 40:34-38

Prepared from the spoken message and lightly edited for readability. Scripture quotations and spoken phrasing are preserved as delivered.

Would you take God's Word and turn with me to 2 Chronicles chapter 7?

One more time, can we say thank you to our incredible worship team, choir, and musicians? Beautiful.

I'm very excited about this new series we're launching today. This entire fall, we have been talking about what it means to grow deeper in our intimacy with the Lord, to pursue Him at a greater level, to go deeper in our walk with Him. We're promised in Scripture:

> *Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.*
>
> — James 4:8

God drawing near to us is what this five-week series, Holy Fire, is all about. We're going to look at five occurrences in the Old Testament when God drew near. Every time we see Him drawing near in these episodes in Scripture, if you will, holy fire was never far away.

That's the title of the series, and it's the title I'm taking for the message today: Holy Fire.

We could say that fire is one of the primary ways God manifested Himself in the Old Testament. The Scripture even says of God in Hebrews chapter 12, verse 29, quoting Deuteronomy chapter 4, verse 24:

> *For our God is a consuming fire.*
>
> — Hebrews 12:29

When you think about it, fire is one of the richest images we have to describe God's character and nature, His actions.

First of all, if you're taking notes, write this down: Fire draws people in and drives people away.

Wherever there's fire, when we see it, we typically think, "Hey, what's that?" Or if you're walking around in the dark, it's the light of a fire that will illuminate and cause you to draw near.

But we also know fire can be dangerous. We've all seen those scenes on the news when there's a wildfire, and people who live near these wildfires are having to evacuate and evacuate in a hurry. If the fire gets to be too much, we go the opposite direction.

It's a perfect picture of God. Next week, we'll look at Moses when he goes to the burning bush. It's the fire that causes him to turn and say, "I want to go see what this is all about." But then the following week, we're going to

look at when God descends on Mount Sinai and He speaks from fire. He tells the people, “Don’t you get near that fire, or you will die.”

So fire draws people in, and it can drive people away.

Fire also purifies and consumes. I’m getting ready to do a couple of weddings here in a couple of weeks. I will stand before that bride and groom, and when they exchange the rings, I typically always take the ring and say, “This ring is made of the finest and purest of metals, representing the purity of the love that you have for your spouse.”

How did it get pure? It was put into the fire.

In week five, we’re going to see a burning coal taken off a fire and put to the lips of Isaiah, representing atonement and purification. But check this. You know this to be true. You leave anything in the fire long enough, and it’ll be consumed.

I’ll never forget the Friday of Palm Sunday weekend in 2022. Debbie and I had just packed up our last box out of the house we were living in at the time, and it was going to be renovated. We told the girls, “Get enough of your stuff for three months or so. We’re just renovating the downstairs, and if you forget something, we’ll come back up to the house and get it.”

We were moving out, and that night, after we had moved out, most of our stuff that wasn’t in storage we moved into the garage of the house. We were exhausted. We laid down about 11 o’clock, and my neighbor at the time called me.

I saw the phone. It was 11 o’clock, and I thought, “I’m so tired. If it’s important, he’ll leave a message. I’ll call him in the morning.”

It stopped ringing, and immediately a message came up. I opened it, and it said, “Jarrett, your house is on fire,” and this picture was attached to it.

It was on fire. This picture right there. You’re telling me.

We got in the car and drove over there. I’ll never forget the words of the fire department chief who was out there. He said, “Mr. Stephens, I’m sorry, but it’s a total loss.”

It claimed everything, including my Peloton bike. Look at this. I was kind of glad that burned. I hated that thing anyway.

What does the Scripture say?

> *For our God is a consuming fire.*
>
> — Hebrews 12:29

In the coming weeks, we’re going to see that scene where Elijah calls fire down on Mount Carmel. It doesn’t just consume the sacrifice that was being offered. It consumes the entire altar, the entire thing the sacrifice was on.

Fire purifies and consumes.

Thirdly, fire warms and burns. Isn't this true? The weather's changing here in Houston. Some of us are going to go home and build a fire in this bleak midwinter for us here in Houston. When it's cold, we want that fire to keep us warm. But get too close to it, and it will burn us.

John Wesley, at his conversion, wrote in his journal after he had received Christ in 1738, "I felt my heart strangely warmed."

So fire warms, but it also burns. By God's grace, if He draws near, it will no doubt leave a mark, maybe not physically, but certainly spiritually.

Fire is the perfect picture God gives to help us understand a little bit of His character, a little bit of His nature. No wonder God Himself used fire from the beginning to teach His people about Himself and His ways.

Remember Genesis, when Adam and Eve rebel against God and they are dismissed from the garden? The Bible tells us:

> *He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.*
>
> — Genesis 3:24

When God made a covenant with Abraham, do you remember how that Abrahamic covenant was instituted? A smoking fire pot and a blazing torch, representing God Himself, walked through the middle of that sacrifice, establishing the covenant.

Fire is what led the people of Israel through the wilderness. It was a cloud by day and a fire by night.

You get to the New Testament. What was it that was said of Jesus? "There's one coming who's going to baptize with fire."

When the Holy Spirit came in Acts chapter 2, how did the Holy Spirit come? In the form of fire.

When John sees the resurrected Jesus in Revelation chapter 1, he sees Jesus in His glory, and the Bible tells us His eyes were like a blazing fire.

Holy fire. This is who God is, and it's this holy fire that we see in the text we're looking at today, talking about the dedication of the temple in the Old Testament.

Look with me at 2 Chronicles chapter 7, starting in verse 1. The Bible says this:

> *As soon as Solomon finished his prayer, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the Lord filled the temple.*
>
> *And the priests could not enter the house of the Lord, because the glory of the Lord filled the Lord's house.*

> *When all the people of Israel saw the fire come down and the glory of the Lord on the temple, they bowed down with their faces to the ground on the pavement and worshiped and gave thanks to the Lord, saying, "For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever."*
>
> — 2 Chronicles 7:1-3

I had our communications team put this passage into AI to show you a little bit about what this screen behind me can do. This is the image AI came up with of what it might have been like when fire fell on the temple that day. I don't know if this is reality or not, but this is what AI came up with.

Is there any wonder why I chose this passage of Scripture for today? Fire falling at the dedication of the temple, and here we are dedicating this worship center all over again to the glory of God. We are asking, in a very real way, for His holy presence, His holy fire, to fall.

The context of this passage of Scripture is just beautiful and, again, so appropriate for today's service. I want to show you two moves, if you will, in Scripture that get us to 2 Chronicles chapter 7. Then the final move will be just what we read in verses 1 through 3.

Holy Ambition

If you're following along and taking notes, the first move is what I would call holy ambition.

What I'm about to outline for you covers roughly 480 years of history. First Kings chapter 6, verse 1, dates the start of the temple construction to the 480th year after the Exodus.

God miraculously delivers His people from the bondage and slavery of Egypt. You read the story of Exodus, and we talked about this last week. Some scholars call this the cohesive center of biblical theology. It's this idea that from Genesis to Revelation, we see God's primary desire is to be present with His people, to dwell with His people.

It started in the garden. Adam and Eve had unhindered fellowship with God, but they sinned. They were kicked out of the garden, and the rest of Scripture is the story of God pursuing His people to dwell with Him.

In the Old Testament, He did this first through the construction of the tabernacle, or the tent of meeting. This is the predecessor to the temple. God commands Moses:

> *And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst.*
>
> *Exactly as I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle, and of all its furniture, so you shall make it.*
>
> — Exodus 25:8-9

Do it exactly as I tell you to do it.

God wanted to dwell with His people, and the people gave. I mean, they wanted God dwelling with them. They gave so much that Moses had to tell them, "Stop bringing your offering, okay?"

We are not there yet, Champion Forest. Keep bringing that offering, all right?

But Moses told the people of Israel, “We’ve got enough,” and they built the tabernacle. The Bible describes what happened that day when they finished it, when they completed it.

I read this passage of Scripture to every group we walked through this worship center as it was being renovated. It’s Exodus chapter 40, verses 34 through 38:

> *Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.*
>
> *And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled on it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.*
>
> *Throughout all their journeys, whenever the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the people of Israel would set out.*
>
> *But if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not set out till the day that it was taken up.*
>
> *For the cloud of the Lord was on the tabernacle by day, and fire was in it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel throughout all their journeys.*
>
> — Exodus 40:34-38

This is how God dwelled with His people for years. As the people traveled throughout the wilderness, they would construct the tabernacle. The tribes would camp out with the tabernacle at the center, and they made sure that the face of their tent faced the tabernacle where God would dwell.

Moses prophesied in Deuteronomy chapter 12, verses 5 and 11, that there was coming a day when God would choose a physical place to dwell and He would stamp His name there. The temple was an anticipated promise.

You fast-forward, and David becomes king. He captures Jerusalem. He brings the Ark of the Covenant, which symbolized the very presence of God, to Jerusalem, which is now the city of God. We talked about this in the message last week.

David is living in his established headquarters in Jerusalem, and he has this thought:

> *Now when the king lived in his house and the Lord had given him rest from all his surrounding enemies, the king said to Nathan the prophet, “See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells in a tent.”*
>
> — 2 Samuel 7:1-2

“I’m living large,” David says, “but the Ark of God dwells in a tent.”

David sets out. Again, this is a holy ambition. He wants to build a place where God can dwell.

But if you know Bible history, you know what God says to David: “David, you are right to have it in your heart to build Me a temple. You do well to have it in your heart. But because you’re a man of war, you’re not going to get to build the temple. Your son Solomon will.”

David receives that word, but he starts making preparations for the temple. Out of his own treasury, he starts putting back resources and making preparations. In fact, he buys the place where the temple would be built.

This is 1 Chronicles chapter 21. He makes a sacrifice there, at the very place the temple would be constructed, and the Bible tells us the fire of God falls there. David said:

> *Here shall be the house of the Lord God and here the altar of burnt offering for Israel.*
> — 1 Chronicles 22:1

Providentially, that place he bought, where that fire fell, is the same place where, years before, Abraham had marched Isaac up the mountain, and God stayed his hand and provided the sacrifice. It's the same mountain range where, years later, Jesus would go to a cross and be lifted up on that cross, and He would be sacrificed.

It's beautiful how God puts this all together.

David prepares for the temple. He knows he's dying. He brings Solomon in, and he challenges Solomon. He gives Solomon the temple plans and shares with his son all that is in his heart. This is 1 Chronicles chapters 28 and 29.

He tells him, "You be strong and courageous. You do this exactly the way God has instructed us to do it, and you don't stop until that temple is built."

Solomon does exactly what his dad told him to do. The construction of the temple takes seven years. It took us seven months to renovate. It took them seven years to build the temple.

When the work was finished, Solomon brought all of David's dedicated gifts into the temple. He brought the tabernacle, the tent, and its final resting place was in the temple.

What a holy ambition.

It's important to note that this ambition started in the heart of God. God put it into David's heart, and then David put it into Solomon's heart. Solomon ultimately put it into the hearts of the people. They gave, they worked, they sacrificed, and they served. The result was this amazing place where the glory of God dwelled.

Now, you see the parallel, don't you? We know God doesn't live in houses and temples made by the hands of men. He, by the Holy Spirit, now lives in every believer. We can say with confidence, though, that God put in our heart a holy ambition.

Not just our heart. Again, I'm saying it over and over and over, and I'll keep saying it: We are building on the faith of generations of those who have gone before us.

Just as the construction of the tabernacle and the temple spanned generations, so too does the holy ambition of the church called Champion Forest.

He put it into the heart of our founding pastor, Robin Guess, to come to the far reaches of northwest Houston at the time and plant a church where there was no church. There were hardly any other homes, and he planted a church. That's a holy ambition.

That got transferred into the heart of our second pastor, Damon Shook, who for 28 years labored alongside the people of Champion Forest. They were committed. It was a holy ambition that said, "We're going to do

whatever it takes to reach this region, to reach our neighborhood with the gospel of Jesus Christ. If it's another service, if it's a parking garage, if it's a relocation, we're going to do whatever it takes."

That holy ambition continued into our third pastor, Dr. David Fleming, who came here and said, "We've got to continue reaching the next generation."

So he built a children's building, and he built a youth building. He established a ministry and said, "You know what? This church needs to reflect what our community looks like." He began to reach out and make sure we had a diverse church. Now we have one of the largest Spanish congregations in the nation.

It was a holy ambition. God put that in the hearts of our previous pastors, and now we continue.

It's a holy ambition God put into our hearts that said, "We're going to get this ready for the next 25 years." It's a holy ambition that said, "We're going to be a church that is from northwest Houston to the world."

That's why we're going to break ground in two weeks on the expansion at our North Klein campus. It's why we're going to Magnolia. I'll tell you more about that next week. It's why we continue to do everything we can to increase our broadcast and digital outreach ministry so that the message of the gospel can go from northwest Houston to the world.

It's a holy ambition to plant churches all over the world, like we're doing through this next campaign. God put it in our hearts.

Listen, we can't manage holy fire. We can't produce holy fire. But what we can do is, when God puts something in our hearts, seek to accomplish it and pray the fire falls.

There was a holy ambition.

A Holy People

The second move, I want you to notice this. Don't miss it. It's a holy people.

As the temple was completed, just listen to the actions of the leadership. Again, everybody was a part of this: King Solomon, the elders of Israel, the heads of the tribes, and the leaders of the fathers' houses. All of them were a part of it.

The priests brought the Ark of the Covenant into the holy place. Now listen to what the Scripture records:

> *And when the priests came out of the Holy Place, for all the priests who were present had consecrated themselves, without regard to their divisions,*
>
> *and all the Levitical singers, Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun, their sons and kinsmen, arrayed in fine linen, with cymbals, harps, and lyres, stood east of the altar with 120 priests who were trumpeters;*
>
> *and it was the duty of the trumpeters and singers to make themselves heard in unison in praise and thanksgiving to the Lord, and when the song was raised, with trumpets and cymbals and other musical instruments, in praise to the Lord,*

> *"For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever,"*
>
> *the house, the house of the Lord, was filled with a cloud,*
>
> *so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled the house of God.*
>
> — 2 Chronicles 5:11-14

They had to be in unity.

Listen to me. Holy fire only rests on holy people.

Now, I want you to follow me on this. God saves unholy people. That's what He does. His finished work on the cross and in the resurrection is what makes us holy. If you missed last week, go back and listen. This is a positional holiness.

But if we want the manifested presence of God in our lives, if we want holy fire present among us here, we need to live as a consecrated people. Holy people will posture themselves and position themselves to receive and embrace the holy fire of God.

God's presence is not going to rest on someone who is living their way and doing their own thing. God's presence is not going to come and fill a place or a person who is living in sin and wants to do life on their own terms.

God will not bless us with His presence if we presume upon Him and act as if we deserve His presence, or we're worthy of it, or we can just command it anytime we want. No way.

That's why the Israelites made the sacrifices and the offerings. That was the point. They were doing exactly what God told them to do. They were giving over and above so the temple could be constructed. They were making the sacrifices exactly as God told them to do. They worshiped, and they prayed.

But why did they do all of this? They did all of this as an expression of consecration. They postured and positioned themselves to experience the presence of God.

It was God who set them apart and made them holy. Then they acted and lived as a set-apart, holy people.

This is the way it is for me and you as well. We are made holy by the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. We then live out, in practical holiness, a life of worship, a life of a consecrated people.

This is why we give. This is why we pray. This is why we worship. Because we've been set apart by God's grace, and we want to live like it so the presence of God rests on our lives, just like it did on the temple all those years ago.

The desire of our lives is that we would be so saturated with the presence of God that everyone who encounters us knows it.

You read that passage. There was no doubt God was in the house. We ought to be living in such a way, as a consecrated people, that when people walk in and experience our faith and us singing and praising to the

glory of God, they know something is different. God's in the house.

I mean, we want the room to be full. This is wonderful to see. We want the room to be full. But a room full of people, and not a room full of God, what does that matter?

We want a room full of God. If we get a room full of God, He'll draw the people to Himself.

Would you make this your prayer today? "Lord, consecrate this place. Fill me. Fill this house with Your glory."

If we don't, our lives will be void of intimacy, void of power. If we think we can just walk in here, live life on our own terms, and say, "Hey, let me tell you what God will do," He'll saturate this place with His absence.

Holy fire rests on a holy people.

Solomon prays. I wish I had time to go into the prayer. You can read it in your own time in 2 Chronicles chapter 6, verses 14 through 21. He looks back and testifies to a God who keeps His promises.

He even prays in verse 18, "God, there's no room that can contain You. What are we thinking? We know You're bigger than any room."

He begins to pray, and there are seven situations he covers. You can look at these in verses 22 through 39. He covers things like, "When we're wronged by somebody else, let's get to the house and pray. When there's hardship or pestilence or disease, let's get to the house and pray. Cry out to God. When we're defeated by an enemy, let's get to the house and cry out to God. He'll listen to our prayer."

He also prays for the foreigner. Very interesting. If I could highlight one of his prayers, I would highlight this idea of praying for the foreigner in verse 32. He prays for those not of God's people, Israel.

The word "foreigner" in the original language carries this idea of someone without a familiar face. What he prays for them is:

> *That all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you, as do your people Israel, and that they may know that this house that I have built is called by your name.*
>
> — 2 Chronicles 6:33

This is a prayer of salvation for the foreigner. To know God's name and to fear Him, that's a prayer that the unfamiliar faces would put their trust in God.

May we never forget this, Champion Forest. Two major things bring God glory: when we cry out to Him in faith and show our dependence upon Him, and when unfamiliar faces come to know Him.

Let this never be a museum for the saint. This church is to be a hospital for the sinner. It's to be a place of refuge for people who are beat up on life, who need hope, who need Jesus. That's why we're here.

This brings God glory and great honor. When we are crying out to Him in worship, showing our dependence upon Him, and we're welcoming unfamiliar faces who may not look like us, may not speak like us, and may not share the same background we do, this positions us and postures us to welcome the fire of God, should He

decide to let it fall.

It's always been in the heart of God: "My house will be a house of prayer for the nations."

So you have this holy ambition. The second move is a holy people.

Holy Fire

The third and final move is holy fire. That's what we read in verses 1 through 3. Fire fell.

That fire falling, in one word, means accepted. Everything they gave, everything they built, everything they offered, God received. That's why the fire fell. He was pleased with their sacrifice.

Did you notice the response of the people?

> *When all the people of Israel saw the fire come down and the glory of the Lord on the temple, they bowed down with their faces to the ground on the pavement and worshiped and gave thanks to the Lord, saying, "For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever."*
>
> — 2 Chronicles 7:3

When I was in elementary school, it was Bel Air Elementary School. We were the Bel Air Bombers. We were way better than the Sun City Sewer Suckers, all right? We were the Bel Air Bombers.

We had a truancy officer who would come into our school. I don't know why I remember this, but we called him Officer Friendly. He wore a police uniform, and he smiled everywhere he went. It was Officer Friendly.

He would come into assemblies, and he would teach us kids things like what to do if a stranger approaches you, how to handle that situation, or what you should do if you get lost in a big crowd.

I remember one assembly when Officer Friendly taught us what we should do if we catch fire. That is a terrifying thing to teach a second grader, all right?

But I remember. Do you?

Stop, drop, and roll.

That was the response. I thought of Officer Friendly's advice when I read 2 Chronicles chapter 7 this week. That should be our response.

The fire falls. What do we do? We do exactly what Israel did.

We stop. When the fire falls, everything comes to a halt.

We drop. They went to their knees, faces to the pavement.

And maybe we don't roll. What we do is worship, all right?

Like the people of Israel that day, we give thanks, saying and singing, "For He is good, for His steadfast love endures forever."

When the fire fell, that's what God's people did: stop, drop, and worship. That's what we do as well.

Holy ambition. Holy people. Holy fire.

Once we encounter it, we are never the same.

Would you bow your heads in prayer with me?