

Israel's Three Temples

Solomon's Temple

The temple was planned by David as a permanent house of the Lord in Jerusalem (1 Chronicles 28:2). He received the plans from God and gathered much of the material needed for construction, but was not allowed to build the temple because of his background as a man of war (1 Chronicles 22:8; 28:3). Therefore, the task was given to his son, Solomon (1 Samuel 7:9-13; 1 Kings 5:3-4; 1 Chronicles 22:7-17). The temple was built on Mt. Moriah. It was begun in 960 B.C. and completed in seven and one-half years (1 Kings 6:1).

The general plan was like that of the tabernacle with the exception that its dimensions were double those of the tabernacle. It was far more ornate. The building was 90' long, 30' wide, and 45' high. The walls were made of stone and lined with cedar. The roof was also of cedar and the floors were of cypress. The interior was lined with gold and covered with carvings. The interior was divided into two rooms as was the tabernacle. The Holy of Holies was a cube with each dimension being 20 cubits. It housed the Ark of the Covenant which was placed under two large cherubims. It contained the altar of incense, golden candlestick and the Table of Shewbread.

In addition to the temple proper, there was a building housing the officials. The temple area also contained two courts, the inner, being the court of the priests, and the great or outer court which was for Israel. They were separated from each other by a low wall. The court of the priests contained the brazen altar for sacrifice, the brazen sea for the priests to wash themselves, and the brazen lavers for the washing of the utensils (1 Kings 6-7). Solomon's temple was ransacked and burned by Nebuchadnezzar when he besieged Jerusalem in 587 B.C. (2 Kings 25:8-17). The dedication took eight days. Therefore, Solomon's temple was completed in about 953 B.C. and destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar some 450 years later.

Zerubbabel's Temple After the return of the Jews from captivity, Cyrus authorized the erection of a temple in Jerusalem (Ezra 6:3) Construction was begun in 537 B.C. which was the second year after their return. The plan in general followed that of Solomon's temple but on a far less elaborate scale (Ezra 3:12). Many of the vessels from Solomon's temple were destroyed. The Holy of Holies was left empty because the Ark of the Covenant had disappeared. Later Zerubbabel's temple was plundered and used for idolatrous purposes.

Herod's Temple

Work on this temple was begun in 20 B.C. Herod replaced the temple that existed when he began his reign. It was on a grander scale than Zerubbabel's, surrounded by courts. It included an outer court which could be frequented by Gentiles and unclean persons, the women's court, and the inner court, which contained the chambers for storing the utensils and entered onto the priest's court.

This temple proper stood higher than the courts and was approached by a flight of twelve steps. It contained the Holy of Holies and the Holy Place. A veil separated the two. It was this veil that was rent on the occasion of Jesus' death. Matthew 27:51; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45

Herod's temple was the temple of Jesus' time upon the earth. By way of background, the Roman general Pompey conquered Jerusalem in 63 B.C., and made it subject to Rome. Tacitus indicates that Pompey entered the Holy of Holies and was surprised to find it empty. Herod the Great ruled from 37 B.C. to 4 B.C. Known as a master builder, his most famous project was the temple. He extended the temple platform both to the north and south, making the area some 2,500 feet from north to south and 1,000 feet from east to west. Construction began in 20 B.C. and was not finished until A.D. 64, two years before the Jewish revolt and six years before its destruction in A.D. 70. The date of the statement made to Christ in John 2:20 would suggest that the temple had been under construction for forty-six years, thus placing the date of that statement at A.D. 27. John 2:20 says, "Then the Jews said, 'It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?'"

- The place where Zechariah (the future father of John the Baptist) had his vision. Luke 1:5-23
- The Scene of the presentation of the infant Jesus at the temple. Luke 2:22-38
- At age 12 Jesus conversed with the teachers of the law. Luke 2:4
- The pinnacle of the temple where Satan took Jesus and tempted Him to cast himself down. Matthew 4:5-7
- On two occasions Jesus cleansed the temple. John 2:13-22; Matthew 21:12-17