



Good day Worthy Knights,

In this part 102, the Tabernacle 2 of 4

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The Temple of Jerusalem

The Temple of Jerusalem refers to either of two temples that were the centre of worship and national identity in ancient Israelite kingdom.

In the early years of the Israelite Kingdom, the Ark of the Covenant was periodically moved about among several sanctuaries, especially those of Shechem and Shiloh. After King David's capture of Jerusalem, however, the Ark was moved to that city. This action achieved a joining of the major religious objects of the Israelites with the monarchy, and with the city itself, into a central symbol of union of the Israelite tribes.

As the site for a future temple, David chose Mount Moriah, or the Temple Mount, where it was believed Abraham had built the altar on which to sacrifice his son Isaac.

The First Temple was constructed during the reign of David's son, Solomon, and completed in 957 BCE. Other sanctuaries retained their religious functions, however, until Josiah, who reigned c. 640–609 BCE, abolished them and established the Temple of Jerusalem as the only place of sacrifice in the Kingdom of Judah.

The First Temple was built as an abode for the Ark and as a place of assembly for the entire people. The building itself, therefore, was not large, but the courtyard was extensive. The Temple building faced eastward. It was rectangular and consisted of three rooms of equal width: the porch or vestibule (*'ulam*), the main room of religious service or Holy Place (*hekhal*), and the Holy of Holies (*devir*), the sacred room in which the Ark rested. The east side was considered the front of the Temple, and a storehouse (*yazi'a*) surrounded the other three sides.

The First Temple contained five altars: one at the entrance of the Holy of Holies, two others within the building, a large bronze one before the porch, and a large, tiered altar in the courtyard. A huge bronze bowl, or sea, in the courtyard was used for the priests' ablutions.

Within the Holy of Holies, two cherubim of olive wood stood with the Ark; this innermost sanctuary was considered the dwelling place of the Divine Presence (*Shekinah*) and could be entered only by the high priest and only on the Day of Atonement (*Yom Kippur*).

The Temple suffered at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar II of Babylonia, who removed the Temple treasures in 604 BCE and 597 BCE and totally destroyed the building in 587 or 586 BCE. This destruction and the deportation of Jews to Babylonia in 586 and 582 were seen as fulfillments of prophecy and, therefore, strengthened Judaic religious beliefs and awakened the hope for the re-establishment of an independent homeland.

Cyrus II, founder of the Achaemenian dynasty of Persia and conqueror of Babylonia, in 538 BCE issued an order allowing exiled Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple. Work was completed in 515 BCE. There is no known detailed plan of the Second Temple, which was constructed as a modest version of the original building. It was surrounded by two courtyards with chambers, gates, and a public square. It did not include the ritual objects of the First Temple, and of special significance was the loss of the Ark itself. Ritual, however, was elaborate and was conducted by well-organized families of priests and Levites.

During the Persian and Hellenistic periods, 4th–3rd century BCE, the Temple generally was respected, and in part, subsidized by Judaea's foreign rulers. Antiochus IV Epiphanes, however, plundered it in 169 BCE and desecrated it in 167 BCE by commanding that sacrifices be made to Zeus on an altar built for him. This final act touched off the Hasmonean revolt, during which Judas Maccabeus cleansed and re-dedicated the Temple. This event is celebrated in the annual festival of Hanukkah.

During the Roman conquest, Pompey entered the Holy of Holies but left the Temple intact, in 63 BCE. In 54 BCE, Crassus plundered the Temple treasury. Of major importance was the rebuilding of the Second Temple by Herod the Great, King of Judaea, who ruled from 37 BCE to 4 CE.

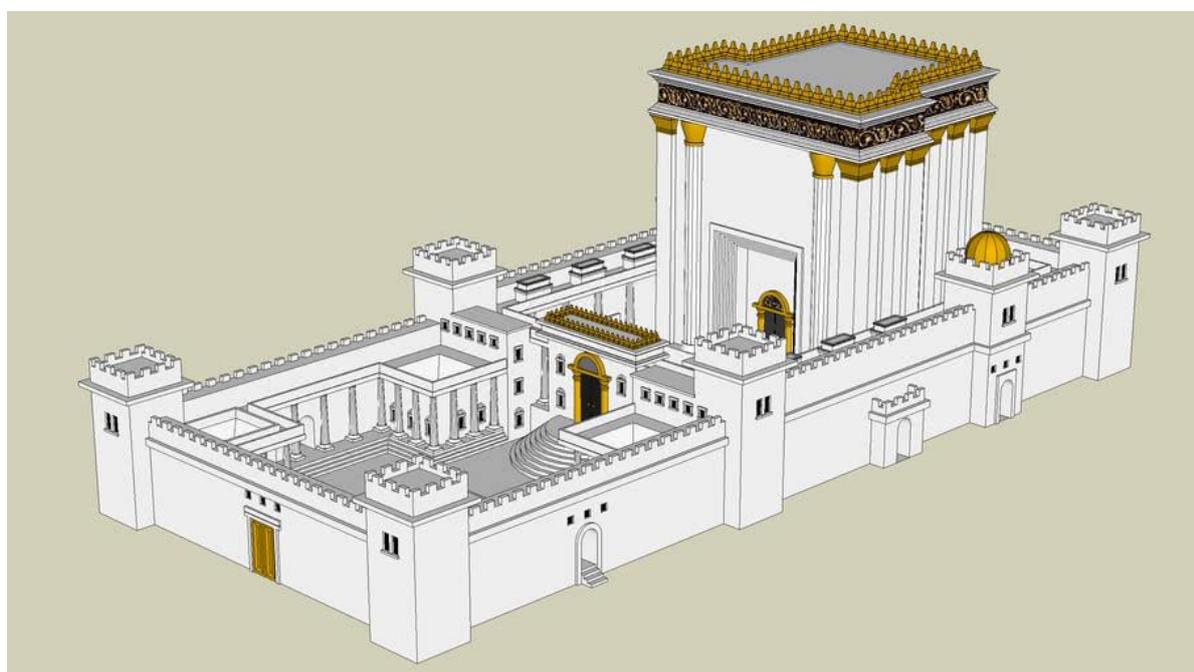
Construction began in 20 BCE and lasted for 46 years. The area of the Temple Mount was doubled and surrounded by a retaining wall with gates. The Temple was raised, enlarged, and faced with white stone. The new Temple square served as a gathering place, and its porticoes sheltered merchants and money changers. A stone fence (soreg) and a rampart (ḥel) surrounded the consecrated area forbidden to Gentiles.

The work on the Temple proper began, on the east side, with the Court of Women, each side of which had a gate and each corner of which had a chamber. This court was so named because of a surrounding balcony on which women observed the annual celebration of Sukkoth. The western gate of the court, approached by a semi-circular staircase, led to the Court of the Israelites, that portion of the Court of Priests which was open to all male Jews.

Surrounding the inner sanctuary, the Court of Priests contained the sacrificial altar and a copper laver for priestly ablutions. This court was itself surrounded by a wall broken with gates and chambers. The Temple sanctuary building was wider in front than in the rear. Its eastern facade had two pillars on either side of the gate to the entrance hall. Within the hall, a great gate led to the sanctuary, at the western end of which was the Holy of Holies.

The Herodian Temple was again the centre of Israelite life. It was not only the focus of religious ritual but also the repository of the Holy Scriptures and other national literature and the meeting place of the Sanhedrin, the highest court of Jewish law during the Roman period. The rebellion against Rome that began in 66 CE soon focused on the Temple and effectively ended with the Temple's destruction on the 9th and 10th of Av, 70 CE, possibly the day on which Tisha B'Av was observed

All that remained of the retaining wall surrounding the Temple Mount was a portion of the Western Wall (also called the Wailing Wall), which continues to be the focus of Jewish aspirations and pilgrimage.



Herod's Temple