



Solomon

The date for the Israelite exodus from Egypt has long been accepted as 1446BC. For almost all of the next 500 years, God dwelt amongst his people in the tabernacle. During the wandering in the desert, this tent went with the Israelites, remaining at the heart of the camp. Once they had settled into their new land, the tabernacle became a fairly fixed point of worship at Gilgal (during the conquest of Canaan), Shiloh (the period of Judges and Samuel), Nob (during Saul's reign) and Gibeon (whilst David was king).

David, early in his reign, proposes building a temple for God (2 Samuel 7), but God tells him not to, and that the temple will be built by David's descendant – this can be seen as Solomon (who we know did construct a temple), but also Jesus, a descendant of David, and the one who founded the greatest kingdom of all [remember, we've seen links between Solomon and Jesus before, such as the coronation psalm 110, with its reference to Melchizedek].

Solomon becomes king of Israel in 970BC, and four years later begins construction of the temple (1 Kings 6-8). This date marks exactly 480 years since the exodus. The building work took a mere seven years, and the temple would stand until the Babylonian conquests of 586BC, a total of 380 years (St Paul's cathedral in its current form has been around for just over 300 years).

Solomon's temple uses the same floor-plan as the tabernacle, but enlarges it. The tabernacle measured 30 cubits by 10 cubits, and was 10 cubits high. The new temple was 60 cubits by 20 cubits, and 30 cubits high (in feet, that's around 90 by 30 by 45 high, equivalent to a modern 5 storey building). As with the tabernacle, and all later temples, it faced east.

The temple was constructed of stone. The stone blocks were quarried and dressed off-site, so that the sound of the tools would not be heard at the temple site. Once the walls were up, the interior was lined with cedar wood, and the floor with pine. These wooden walls were decorated with carvings of cherubim, palm trees and flowers – some have pointed out that this is reminiscent of Eden, a garden paradise guarded by cherubim, and the last place where man was truly able to meet with God. However, this is speculation, and not given as a reason in the Kings account of the temple's construction.

The Holy of Holies remained a cubical space beyond the main temple space (meaning that it was raised up, or had a lowered ceiling, or both). This space contained the ark (which appears to now only contain the stone tablets (1 Kings 8:9), and two gold cherubim, whose wings stretched the width of the room. This room was lined with gold, as was the floor (and possibly the walls) of the outer room. Unlike the tabernacle, the divider between the Holy of Holies and the outer room was a cedar wall (perhaps covered by a curtain).

Finally, we know that God chose to live in the temple, as he had done in the tabernacle, as 1 Kings 8:10-11 tells us 'When the priests withdrew from the Holy Place, the cloud filled the temple of the Lord. And the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled his temple.



Herod the Great

Herod the Great (the one who was responsible for killing the infants at the time of Jesus birth, but not the one around at the time of Jesus death [that was his son, Herod Antipas]) became king of the Roman province of Judea in 37BC. He was Idumean, not Jewish by birth, but was put in place by the Romans as a 'client-king', or local ruler. Having survived a period of upheaval (famine, assassination attempts, murdering various members of his family), Herod began major reconstruction of the temple in 20BC (still some 15 years before the birth of Jesus).

This would be the greatest of all the building projects, expanding the sanctuary building into a massive edifice, and extending the hill-top platform of the temple to allow for extensive courts and outer buildings. The work was not completed until 64AD (around the same time as the death of Paul and Peter), having taken 84 years and outlasting Herod (who died in 4BC), and all of his sons. Sadly, the temple only survived another six years before its destruction at the hands of the Romans at the climax of the Jewish rebellion. When the Roman army successfully besieged Jerusalem in 70AD, they destroyed the temple, sweeping the foundation platform clear of all traces of the complex. Today, only the 'wailing wall', part of the foundation structure, survives.

Herod's temple made use of the same floor-plan as Zerubbabel's (and Solomon's), but felt at liberty to build upwards, and extended the height of the building to 100 cubits (150 feet, over 15 storeys high). Internally, the sanctuary reached up to 60 cubits, although the Holy of Holies retained its original dimensions.

The bible tells us little about the construction of the temple – much of the important work seems to have occurred before the ministry of Jesus (and long after the time of Malachi), a period about which we have little biblical information. However, the temple courts form a backdrop for many of the significant events of Jesus' life, and it is likely that much of his teaching happened there, particularly when based in Jerusalem.

The destruction of the temple in 70AD is considered by many scholars to be vitally significant in the dating of New Testament documents, because none of them mention it. Whilst this seems superficially odd, it is unlikely that an event of such political, military and religious significance would pass unremarked (especially given the comments of Jesus about 'destroying the temple', and the apocalyptic revelation of John). This leads to a school of thought that the entire NT canon had been completed before 70AD, and so within 40 or so years of Jesus' resurrection.