

RUSSELL SANDERS

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THE HISTORY OF THE TEMPLE

We have completed study on the Feast of Tabernacles. The “tabernacle of the congregation” was replaced by a permanent Temple built by King Solomon.

“Solomon’s” Temple, as it is called, was not particularly large, but it was quite ornate. Much of it was made of gold or overlaid with gold. Its frame was of the finest cedars of Lebanon. Its sanctified vessels were of gold, silver, and brass. It was the most elaborate, ornate, and beautiful structure of its day. It held the ark of the covenant.

The date of its construction is not certain, depending on the arguable date of Solomon’s coronation as king. It was somewhere after 1000 B.C. and perhaps as late as 950 B.C.

Despite having such a magnificent temple for God’s holy presence, the people frequently followed pagan gods instead of Jehovah (YHWH). Solomon in his later years, actually led Israel into idolatry despite the fact that Jehovah had twice personally appeared to him. This idolatry over a period of 400 years led to the utter destruction of Solomon’s temple in 586 B.C. by the Babylonians.

In 536 B.C. Israelites were released from Babylonian captivity free to return to Judea. Zerubbabel was commissioned to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, and also the Temple. With the support of Ezra, the priest, he got the walls built and an initial start on the Temple. However, due to resistance, the building of the second Temple was delayed. Inspired by the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, Temple construction was resumed in 516 B.C.

The second Temple was much more basic, not at all rich and ornate like Solomons Temple. However, it became more important to the people’s actual observance. Due to seventy years of captivity in a pagan nation, they now had a greater appreciation for God’s Temple and its observances.

Over the next three centuries, that devotion began to wane. In 168 B.C. the Syrian King Antiochus Epiphanes sought to eradicate the Jewish religion. He took Jerusalem, wreaking havoc upon the inhabitants. He desecrated the Temple profanely and took away all its sanctified vessels. The Jews of Jerusalem forsook their faith and aligned with the new ideology of Hellenism (Greek culture).

From the hills of Judea arose opposition led by Judas Maccabees and his family. They challenged the apostate Jews to return to their faith. He restored the Temple although not elaborately. He restored the light (menorah/candle) that God had said should never go out, but it had.

In 63 B.C. the Roman General Pompey captured Jerusalem and took the Temple. Nine years later it was stripped of all its gold. The Temple itself was not destroyed, but it had none of its former elegance. It was somewhat bare. That changed when Herod the Great was made Regent (King) over Judea by Rome. Herod was a builder of many structures. Among them was a complete renovation of the second (Zerubbabel's) Temple. In 20 B.C. to 19 B.C., he completely rebuilt it into a magnificent edifice, quite elaborate. It was like a brand-new Temple not even closely resembling the Second Temple by Zerubbabel. It was called "Herod's Temple" and considered to be like a third Temple. The Jews were proud of it and religious worship and sacrifices brought a revival of Judaism.

Rome, under Nero, began persecution which led to the invasion by Roman General Titus in 66 A.D. Taken in 70 A.D., he laid waste to the entire city of Jerusalem. That included the utter destruction of Herod's Temple. It has never been rebuilt. The Jews scattered abroad among many nations. This was known as the Diaspora (the scattering). The Bible prophesies that another Temple will be built in Jerusalem. We shall discuss that tomorrow.