

Zerubbabel's Temple

As Royal Arch Masons, the name Zerubbabel is very familiar to us, but who exactly was this individual and what did he do?

The name Zerubbabel means “born in Babel” or Babylon, as we know it today. He was the grandson of King Jehoiachin of Judah who, along with his Jewish subjects, was captured by the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar and transported to Babylon in 586 BCE. Thus Zerubbabel was a direct descendant of King David, who had left his son Solomon with the task of completing the First Temple at Jerusalem.

In captivity, Zerubbabel became acquainted with Cyrus, the grandson of Nebuchadnezzar, and when Cyrus ascended to the Persian throne, Zerubbabel approached him, proposing to rebuild the Temple at Jerusalem, Cyrus consented and appointed Zerubbabel as Governor of the Persian province of Judea. He also gave Zerubbabel gold and ordered that all of the gold and silver vessels which Nebuchadnezzar had carried away from the Temple be returned to Zerubbabel and restored to their proper places in the new Temple.

To fully understand history of Zerubbabel's Temple, we need to briefly review the Temple of Solomon, or the First Temple, and its destruction. This Temple was completed around 950 BCE, and was the most magnificent building in those times. In current terms, its construction cost approximately \$220B. In 586 BCE, all of Jerusalem, including King Solomon's Temple, was pillaged and burned. This First Temple, adorned with gold shields and all manner of exquisite beauty and wealth was totally stripped bare and utterly destroyed. The ruins remained untouched throughout the 70-year Babylonian Captivity of the Jews.

In 538 BCE, the first wave of former Jewish captives was permitted to return to Jerusalem. They numbered 42,360 and with them they carried the decree from Cyrus to build a new Temple on the site of King Solomon's Temple on Mount Moriah. Very soon after their arrival at Jerusalem, work started.

It took two years to clear the rubble of the former Temple and lay the foundation for Zerubbabel's Temple. Then construction was delayed by the intrigues and active opposition of Samaritan settlers whose friendly overtures masked a hidden hostility. Zerubbabel became discouraged: He had few workmen; his people were being mocked for their efforts; and the labourers were disorganized. As well, as a result of the opposition to the Temple construction, Persia withdrew its support for the project, and for 17 years the temple lay unfinished.

In 520 BCE, the prophets Haggai and Zechariah arrived to support Zerubbabel and to encourage the Jewish community. An interesting quote from Zechariah relates, "in the eighth month, in the second year of Darius, the word of the Lord came to the prophet Zechariah, the son of Berechiah and grandson of Iddo." Each name means:

Zechariah – God remembers;

Berechiah – God blesses; and

Iddo – at the appointed time; or

"God remembers and blesses at the appointed time."

The exhortations of the prophets succeeded in energizing the people and work on the second Temple resumed. The workmen,

previously disorganized and mostly impoverished, were united in purpose and properly administered. Construction proceeded unimpeded and five years later the Temple was completed.

Zerubbabel's Temple was dedicated in the sixth year of the reign of Darius, on 12 March 515 BCE, with great fanfare. Some of the most elderly witnesses to this event recalled the grandeur of the former temple, and were dismayed that this Second Temple was smaller and less grandiose of the original one, though there had been far fewer resources and much less manpower to support its construction. Also, Solomon's temple had housed the Ark of the Covenant, lost or burned at the destruction of Jerusalem and never renewed. In addition, at the First Temple's dedication, the altar had been lit by fire from heaven, and the Temple had been filled with the [Shekinah](#), or manifestation of the glory of the Lord. Further missing were the Urim and Thummim, a means of revelation entrusted to the High Priest alone, along with the spirit of prophesy. Attendees at the second temple's dedication witnessed no such miracles. Even so, Haggai prophesied that the Second Temple would one day have a magnificence to outshine the glory of the first.

Interestingly, Zerubbabel is never mentioned in connection with the dedication ceremonies, nor is his name mentioned again after the Book of Ezra, Chapter 5, Verse 1. For this reason, Zerubbabel's Temple is often referred to simply as the "Second Temple". This disappearing act is likely an oversight, as records indicate that Zerubbabel remained the Governor of Judah for 57 years or until 481 BCE.

The high priesthood in the new Temple presided for nearly 350 years in the family of Zadok, which had previously filled the chief priest

positions in King Solomon's Temple from its dedication in 950 BCE to its destruction in 586 BCE.

Zerubbabel's Temple was repaired and enlarged at various times between its dedication and its destruction during the time of Herod.

Around 366 BCE, the Temple was the scene of the murder of Jesus, the son of Judas, by his brother Johanan, the High Priest. In consequence, it was profanely entered by Bagoses, the Persian Governor of Syria.

In 332 BCE, Alexander the Great is said by Josephus to have offered sacrifices in Zerubbabel's Temple.

Around 300 BCE, Simon the Just, the High Priest, repaired and fortified the temple.

In 217 BCE, Ptolemy Philopater insisted on entering the Holy of Holies but was smitten so that he was carried half-dead from the Temple courts.

In 200 BCE, Antiochus the Great, in return for help given to him by the Jews against the Egyptians, provided materials for building the cloisters and other parts of the Temple, made a grant to provide sacrifices, and decreed that no stranger should enter within the Temple enclosure.

In 168 BCE, Antiochus Epiphanes entered the Temple "proudly"; stripped it of its golden altar, candlesticks, table of showbread and other items; polluted it by offering swine upon the Altar; burned its gates; and pulled down the priests' chambers. It remained desolate for three years; then, in 165 BCE, Judas Maccabaeus cleansed it and

restored it to use. He and his brothers Jonathan and Simon subsequently fortified the sanctuary with high walls and towers.

In 95 BCE, Alexander Jannaeus built a partition wall of wood around the Altar and the Temple so as to separate the court of the priests from that of the people.

When he took Jerusalem in 63 BCE, Pompey slew the priests at the Altar and entered the Holy of Holies, but left the rich treasures intact, and commanded that it be cleansed the next day.

When Herod entered Jerusalem in 37 BCE, some of the Temple cloisters were burned, but he used entreaties, threats and even force to restrain his foreign soldiery from entering the Sanctuary.

In keeping with Haggai's prophesy 500 years earlier, Jesus Christ walked the courts of the temple that Zerubbabel built.

But this Temple was not to last forever, either. Much as the Babylonians destroyed the First Temple, the Romans destroyed the Second Temple and Jerusalem in 70 CE as retaliation for an ongoing Jewish revolt. Zerubbabel's Temple had lasted for a total of 585 years (516 BCE to 70 CE).

Excellent Companion Boniecki, this concludes my presentation and, with your permission, I would be happy to entertain questions and comments from the Companions.