A reconstruction of Solomon's Temple

David purchased the site for a temple for 50 silver shekels from Araunah the Jebusite. This site is identified with Mount Moriah – today the Temple Mount, Jerusalem – where Abraham had been told years before to sacrifice his son Isaac. The building of the Temple began in the fourth year of Solomon’s reign, about 959 BC, and took seven years to complete. It was a national project of immense size. To preserve the holiness of the Temple site, and minimize noise, most of the masonry and carpentry was completed elsewhere, before the components were assembled on the actual site. Detailed accounts in the Bible of the Temple’s construction enable us to make a quite accurate reconstruction of Solomon’s Temple.

One of the most impressive objects outside the Temple was the “molten sea”, a huge, round tank made of bronze which stood opposite the great altar. This tank was supported on the back of twelve bronze oxen, three at each point of the compass, and held about 40,000 litres (10,000 US gallons) of water. It was used by the priests for ceremonial washing.

The Ark of the Covenant was placed in the Holiest Place of the Temple. The Ark, the only major item surviving from Moses’ Tabernacle, still contained the tablets of the Law, but the pot of manna and Aaron’s rod had disappeared.

Inside the Holy Place were ten golden lampstands – five on each side – which had to be trimmed regularly by the priests to ensure that they were never extinguished.

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What did the Temple look like?

The Bible describes the building of the Temple in detail (see for example 1 Kings 5:1 – 9:10 and 2 Chronicles chapters 2–7). It gives us enough detail to make quite an accurate model of the Temple.

But of course the Bible doesn't give us architect's drawings. There is a lot we still don't know. For instance, we don't know how thick the Temple walls were. And we're not sure exactly how the altar was constructed. Archaeology doesn't help much, since most temples of this time have long since been razed to the ground.