

Brazil's 'Billionaire Bishop' Builds \$300M Solomon's Temple Replica

A 10,000-seat rendition of Solomon's Temple was inaugurated last week in São Paulo, Brazil, owned by the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God.

The large 11-story complex has a helicopter landing pad, allowing Universal Church founder and Brazil's "billionaire bishop," Edir Macedo, to drop in for sermons. It also features an oasis of olive trees similar to the garden of Gethsemane near Jerusalem and more than 30 towering columns.

"The Universal Church spared no expense," Rogério Araújo told *The New York Times*. "We sought to build a colossus, something that would make people stop and gaze, and that's what we delivered."

The *Times* reports: "The replica of Solomon's Temple includes several menorahs inside the structure, where sermons will be given, in addition to a large menorah near the entrance that resembles the one in front of the Knesset, Israel's legislature. The flag of Israel also flies nearby, alongside those of the Universal Church, Brazil and the United States, among dozens of other countries."

It cost about \$300 million and took four years to build. The project displays the growth of evangelical faiths in Brazil. "Although this country of 200 million people still has more Roman Catholics than any other nation, the number of evangelicals in Brazil climbed to 22 percent of the population in 2010 from 15 percent in 2000, according to census figures," the *Times* reported.

Macedo has had a large part in helping to change Brazil's

religious landscape. A religious broadcaster and founder of the Universal Church, he believes in exorcism and faith healing. Macedo became well known through his control of one of Brazil's largest television networks, Rede Record. His personal fortune is sometimes estimated at \$1.2 billion.

But the church founder is not without scandal. He has fought accusations of corruption—including tax evasion and money laundering—and was jailed for 11 days in 1992 on accusations of charlatanism and fraud.

A spokeswoman for the Universal Church told the *Times* that Macedo had been absolved “in an array of judicial investigations into corruption allegations, strengthening the church's ‘preaching of the gospel.’”

The new temple will be one of Brazil's largest religious structures, dwarfing Rio de Janeiro's iconic Christ the Redeemer mountain-top statue.

“The monumental temple will be a powerful symbol both of Brazil as the epicenter of global Pentecostalism and of the Universal Church as the leading congregation challenging the Catholic Church in Brazil,” R. Andrew Chesnut, an expert on Latin American religions at Virginia Commonwealth University, told the *Times*.