

**KING SOLOMON'S TEMPLE AND FREEMASONRY**

by

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The Temple of Solomon was a small building by modern standards, no larger than most of our Masonic Temples today. The Temple proper was 70 cubits long and 20 cubits wide. The porch was 120 cubits high, but the main building was only 30 cubits high.

The cubit was the ancient unit of length. Its value varied from time to time and from place to place. Typical values are 18.22 inches for the Greek cubit, 18.22 inches for the Roman Cubit, and 17.58 inches for the Hebrew cubit. Actually the cubit was the length of the forearm, from the elbow to the tip of the middle finger, usually that of the reigning monarch or a previous monarch.

The cubit was divided into two spans, six palms and 214 fingers. The span was the distance from the tip of the thumb to the tip of the little finger when fully extended. The palm was the width of the palm of the hand, and the finger was the width of one finger. These units of length enabled the workmen to make approximate measurements without the use of a rule. If you measure your own forearm, span, palm and finger, you will find that these subdivisions are a reasonably good approximation, even today.

Because of the cubit into 214 fingers, it was the ancient equivalent of the 24-inch gage referred to as one of the working tools of the E.A.

One of the ancient standards of length that has come down to us is the Egyptian Royal Cubit of Amenhotep I, in use about 1500 B. C., or 500 years before the construction of King Solomon's Temple. This Royal Cubit was 20.63 inches long, and was divided into 28 finger, or 7 palms, and indicated the small, or common cubit to consist of two spans, six palms or 4. fingers. On this basis the common cubit was 17.58 inches long, the same as the Hebrew cubit. The standard was made of black granite, and was carefully engraved with divisions to 1/16 of a finger. It was placed in the custody of the Royal Architect. Working cubits of wood, were duplicated from the standard, and were used by the artisans in building the pyramids, tombs, temples, and palaces of ancient Egypt.

If we accept the length of 17.58 inches for the cubit used in the construction of Solomon's Temple, it was 102.55 feet long; 29.3 feet wide and 43.95 feet high. The porch was 17.58 feet high.

The Temple was begun in the year of the World 2992 (1012 B.C.), the fourth year of the reign of Solomon, and was completed in about 7½ years, in the year 3000 (1014 B.C.). It retained its original splendor for but 33 years. In 3033 Shishak, King of Egypt, besieged and took Jerusalem, and carried away the choicest treasures of the Temple. From that time until its final destruction by Nebuchadnezzar in 3416 (588 B.C.), its history is but a repeated story of spoliation and repair.

The Jews were carried away to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar where they remained captives until the reign of Cyrus, King of Persia, by whom they were

liberated in 3468 (536 B.C.): 42,360 of the captives returned to Jerusalem, and one year later, under the direction of Joshua, the High Priest; Zerubbabel, the Prince of Judah; and Hagaii, the Scribe, laid the foundation of the Second Temple. The work was impeded and at times even caused to stop by political intrigue, and a full 20 years passed before its completion in the 6th year of the reign of Darius, King of Persia, 515 B.C.

The Second Temple was similar to the first in plan, but was one third larger in each dimension. The decorations of gold and other ornaments in the first Temple must have far surpassed those bestowed upon the second, for we are told by Josephus that "the Priests and Levites and Elders of families were disconsolate at seeing how much more sumptuous the old Temple was than the one which, on account of their poverty, they had just been able to erect."

Five things were present in the First Temple that were missing in the second: the Ark, the Urim and Thummin, the Fire from Heaven, the Chacina or the Divine Presence or Cloud of Glory, and the Spirit of Prophecy and Power of Miracles. 11.

The Jews were a nomadic people, chiefly occupied as herdsmen and warriors. They lived in tents, and until the Temple was built their House of Worship, the Tabernacle erected by David, was nothing but a large tent. Building, or at least the construction of an edifice such as the Temple, was to them an unknown art. It is easy to see why they considered the Temple to be so magnificent, for it was truly magnificent, even by present day standards.

The Temple was planned by David, who numbered the workmen in his kingdom, appointed the overseers of the work, the hewers of stones and bearers of burdens, prepared a great quantity of brass, iron and cedar, and amassed a huge fortune to carry out its construction. But he heard the word of God from the Prophet Nathan -- "Thou hast shed blood abundantly, and hast made great wars; thou shalt not build a house unto My Name, because thou hast shed much blood upon the earth in my sight." The task of building the Temple was therefore reserved for his son and successor, Solomon.

David, before his death, charged Solomon to build the Temple, as soon as he should come into his kingdom, and gave him directions in relation to the construction, together with the fortune he had amassed for defraying the expense. In 1 Chronicles, 22: 114, this fortune is stated to be "an hundred thousand talents of gold, and a thousand thousand talents of silver." Josephus, however, (Book 7, Chapter 114) reports that it was "ten thousand talents of gold and a hundred thousand talents of silver, collected together, I have also laid together brass and iron without number, and an immense quantity of timber and of stone." The discrepancy is probably due to an error in copying or in translation as these books were handed down for centuries before the printing press was invented.

The talent was both a unit of weight and a unit of coinage. Some authorities say that it was not used in coinage until 139 B.C.. and on this basis it is likely that the reference is to weight, and not coinage. For ordinary materials, the talent consisted of 60 minas of 60 shekels each. For gold and silver, there were only 50 shekels to the mina, so the talent of gold or silver was only 3000 shekels, instead of the 3600 shekels for ordinary materials.

The weight of a shekel varied from time to time and from place to place, and at the same time and place depending on the material to be weighed. In

Babylon, a gold shekel weighed 252  $\frac{2}{3}$  grains, a silver shekel 336 grains, and a Royal Shekel, used in commerce for ordinary materials, weighed 346 grains. The Syrian shekel was 320 grains, the Phoenician shekel 224 grains, and the Hebrew gold shekel 252  $\frac{2}{3}$  grains and silver shekel 224 $\frac{1}{2}$  grains. All of these values are for the "heavy shekel". There was also a "light shekel" in each case that weighed exactly half as much as the heavy shekel. If we use the value for the Hebrew shekel, a gold shekel weighed 0.525 Troy ounce, and a silver shekel 0.468 Troy ounce. The price of gold and silver has been fluctuating wildly since controls were removed. Perhaps a good estimate is \$175 per ounce for gold and \$14.27 per ounce for silver. On this basis a gold shekel is worth about \$92, and a silver shekel about \$2. Thus, 10,000 talents of gold and 100,000 talents of silver would be worth over \$875,000,000 dollars today.

In the perhaps more familiar terms of weight, 10,000 talents of gold would weigh 541.5 tons, and 100,000 talents of silver would be 4810 tons. Viewed with in terms of monetary value or weight of metal, the fortune of David was truly tremendous, even by current standards.

Solomon, realizing the deficiencies of his own people as builders, sought the aid of his father's friend and ally, Hiram, King of Tyre. The Tyrians and Sidonians had long been distinguished for their great architectural skill, and in fact many of them, as members of a mystic society, the Dionesian Artificers, had long monopolized the profession of building in Asia Minor.

Hiram gladly agreed to assist, and sent 33,600 workmen from Tyre, plus a sufficient quantity

of timber and stone to erect the Temple. He also sent a far more important gift in the person of an able architect, a "curious and cunning workman" to superintend the construction and adornment of the building, Hiram Abif.

12.

The Temple was built on Mount Moriah, one of the heights of Mount Zion, which was originally the threshing floor of Oman the Jebusite, from whom it was purchased by David. The Temple was built on a very hard rock, encompassed by great precipices. The foundation was laid very deep, with great labor and expense. It was surrounded with a wall of great height, of over 1450 feet at its lowest point, all of white marble.

The magnificence of the Temple lay not in its size, but in its prominent position, dominating the surrounding countryside, its numerous terraces, its extensive outer courts, and the richness of its external and internal decorations. The Temple itself was but a small part of the edifice on Mount Moriah. It was surrounded with three courts, and the whole structure was at least half a mile in circumference. The first court, just inside the outer wall, was called the Court of the Gentiles, because Gentiles were admitted to it, but were prohibited from passing further. It was surrounded with a range of porticos or cloisters above which were galleries or apartments, supported by pillars of white marble.

The Court of the Gentiles surrounded the Court of the Children of Israel, which was divided by a low wall and a flight of 15 steps into two divisions, the outer one being occupied by the women and children, and the inner one by the men. Here the Jews worshipped and prayed daily.

Within the Court of the Israelites, and separated from it by a wall one cubit in height, was the Court of the Priests, in the center of which was the altar of burnt offerings, to which the Jews brought their sacrifices, but only the Priests were permitted to enter it.

From the Court of the Priests a flight of 12 steps ascended to the Temple proper, which was divided into three parts, the porch, the sanctuary, and the Holy of Holies. At the entrance to the porch was a gate of Corinthian brass, the most precious metal known to the ancients. Beside the gate were the two brazen pillars, Jachin and Boaz.

The porch was separated from the sanctuary by a magnificent veil of many colors, representing the universe. In the sanctuary were placed the various utensils necessary for the daily worship at the Temple, such as the altar of incense, the 10 golden candlesticks and the 10 tables on which offerings were laid previous to the sacrifice.

The Holy of Holies, or innermost chamber, was separated from the sanctuary by doors of olive, richly adorned and inlaid with gold, and covered with veils of blue, purple, scarlet and finest linen. It contained the Ark of the Covenant, which had been transferred to it from the Tabernacle, with the overshadowing Cherubim and its Mercyseat. This chamber could be entered by the High Priest, and that only once a year, on the Day of Atonement.

These are the bare facts of history relating to the Temple that forms the central theme of symbol that is the foundation of Ancient Craft Masonry. In our ritual the facts have been embellished with details that help to bring to life the characters of history, and to better teach the important lessons of our noble craft.

As an Entered Apprentice you were symbolically conducted around the outer courts of the Temple, and were told of its beautiful proportions, its massive pillars, its lights, its jewels and its furniture. As a Fellowcraft you entered the Middle Chamber by passing between the Pillars and by way of the 15 steps, whose significance was explained to you, and were welcomed by the Worshipful Master. Finally, as a Master Mason you represented the Chief Architect in the unfinished Holy of Holies, saw how the principal secret was lost, and received a substitute for it.

It is interesting to note that in the Temple that 15 steps occurred in the Court of the Israelites, and separated the Court of Women and Children from the Court of Men. Hence ascending 13. these steps was symbolic of passing from youth to manhood. This ties in with the ritual in that as an Entered Apprentice you represented Youth, and as a Fellowcraft you represented a Man in the full vigor of manhood.

As a Royal Arch Mason you learned in the Mark Master Degree how our ancient brethren of the Fellowcrafts' Degree identified their work and received their wages. The Past Masters' Degree teaches the important duties and secrets belonging to those elected to preside over Masonic Lodges, and the duties of the Craft to the chair. In the Most Excellent Masters' Degree you were present at the completion and dedication of the Temple, and the laying of the keystone. In the Royal Arch Degree you were present at the symbolic destruction of the first Temple, and represented a captive carried to Babylon, were finally freed, and returned to Jerusalem over rough and rugged roads to assist in the rebuilding of the Temple. While engaged in this work, you helped to discover the secrets lost before the completion of the first Temple, and finally received the long-lost word of a Master Mason,

In the Royal Masters' Degree you learned how a clue to the disposition of

the Masters' word was conveyed to our surviving Grand Masters, and in the Select Masters' Degree how the secrets discovered in the Royal Arch Degree had been deposited. In the Super Excellent Masters' Degree you learned of the perfidy and rebellion of Zedekiah, last King of Judah, and the terrible vengeance of Nebuchadnezzar after the final destruction of the Temple.

It would not be appropriate to conclude this article about the Temple of Solomon without some brief reference to its symbolism. Most Masons, at first thought, will recognize that there is a certain degree of identity between the Temple and the Lodge or lodgeroom. However, this is a rather superficial symbolism, as a little thought will reveal. The lodgeroom is merely serving as the scene for certain dramas that are being enacted in the ritual, and there is no intention that the Lodge itself should be symbolically or otherwise, considered to represent the Temple of Solomon.

Well-informed Masons usually consider the Temple to be a symbol of the spiritual side of the individual, and each Mason is expected to build his own Temple in developing his own character. Christ said "Know ye are the Temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you." Symbolic Masons, therefore, make the Temple of Solomon the symbol of this life. The great object of Masonry is the search for light and truth, and this symbolic Temple is to be a fitting receptacle for the truth that they find, just as the Temple of Solomon was a fitting receptacle for the Author of All Truth.

The Temple of Solomon is a fitting symbol of this life, for like life it was utterly destroyed, and during its existence it had periods when it was dedicated to the worship of the True God, and periods when it was polluted to the service of Baal and other false idols or Gods. Variable in its purpose, evanescent in its very existence, it becomes a fit symbol of human life, occupied in the search for divine truth, which is nowhere to be found; now sinning, now repentant; now vigorous with health and strength, and shortly thereafter a senseless and mouldering corpse.

The second Temple, constructed by Joshua, Zerubbabel and Haggai, is considered by Royal Arch Masons to be the symbol of the life to come, where the lost truth shall be found, where new incense shall arise from a new altar, and whose perpetuity their Grand Master has promised when, in the very spirit of symbolism, he said, "Destroy this Temple and in three days I will raise it up." In the ritual the construction of the second Temple is never even started. All that is done is to clear away the rubbish of the old Temple preparatory to laying the foundations of the new. This is appropriate to the symbolism, because we cannot see in this life what our future life will be, except with the eyes of faith.

Thus to the Master Mason the Temple of Solomon is the symbol of this life; to the Royal Arch Mason the Temple of Zerubbabel, the rebuilt Temple of Solomon, is the symbol of life eternal. To the former, his Temple is the search for truth; to the latter, his Temple is the symbol of the discovery of truth.