

VICTORIA LODGE OF EDUCATION AND RESEARCH  
650 Fisgard Street, Victoria, B.C. V8W 1R6  
1993 - 5

#### **SOME HISTORICAL ASPECTS OF THE TEMPLE OF KING SOLOMON**

by

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The Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem occupies a position of fascinating importance in Judaism and Christianity as well as Islam. In great antiquity the most permanent house of the Lord in Jerusalem was proposed by David who purchased the site and gathered together much of the materials for the original edifice. To this end David collected immense quantities of gold and silver. This was assessed to be some three-thousand talents of gold and seven-thousand talents of silver.

The word talent is derived from the Greek word TALENTON and later the Latin word TALENTUM. It is a unit of monetary measurement which, to the ancient Hebrews, represented three-thousand shekels. In turn, the word shekel is derived from the Hebrew SHAGAL, which means to weigh. It is believed that the gold shekel was of the value of about five contemporary dollars and the silver shekel was valued at about sixty cents. There are references which allude to the value of the gold talent as being that of about ninety-three and a quarter pounds avoirdupois. The value of the silver talent is referred to as being between \$1,655 and \$1,900 dollars. This information merely frames the fact that an immense amount of wealth was collected for the purpose of the Temple.

The design of the temple was not new but already was of some antiquity. As far as history has indicated, the site of what would become the Temple of Solomon was first utilized as a ceremonial location for the worshippers of Baal. The Hebrew word Baal is derived from the Phoenician ba'al, which meant "owner" or "lord". Ancient Semitic (The word Semite and hence Semitic is worthy of some analysis considering its contemporary usage. A Semite is considered to be a person who is regarded as descending from Shern. Also the word Semite is used to refer to a member of any of the peoples speaking a Semitic language, including the Hebrews, Arabs, Assyrians, Phoenicians etc. In modern usage the word is incorrectly used as being interchangeable with the word Jew.) peoples used the word Baal to be the name of innumerable local gods who were thought to control the fertility of the soil and domestic animals.

Due to the fact that individual Baals were not universally conceived as identical they should not be considered as individual interpretations of a unified deity. Each individual Baal was separate and distinct unto itself. When referred to in the plural form Baalim, the meaning is that of idols or Baals collectively. The name Baal derives its origin from a part of the names of various extant gods such as Baal-berith (the lord of the covenant) of the Schechemites. Likewise Baalzebub was the lord of the flies of the Philistines. The early Hebrews learned the worship of Baal from the then agricultural Canaanites.

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Little is known of the worship of Baal except for the offerings of fruits and the first born of cattle. The shrines of the Baalites were little more than altars with the symbol of the Canaanite and Hebrew female deity Ashtoreth set beside them. Scared pillars were often erected in close proximity to the altar. The word Baal has been compounded with many Hebrew, Chaldean, Phoenician and Carthaginian personal and place-nouns such as Baalbek, Eth-baal, Jezebel, Shadrubal and Hannibal.

The side of this particular early shrine to Baal was selected as being a prominence which had as its crown a large rock. Grooves were carved into the rock to accommodate the flow of blood from the sacrificial victim on the rock down through designated passages to a chamber which was created below the rock. The reason for the retention of the blood has been lost in antiquity and can only be a matter of conjectures. The fact is that there were blood sacrifices and the blood was collected in the crypt below the rock.

The location of this early holy place was on a Jerusalem hilltop west of Kidron and north of the ancient city of David. King David lived about 990 B.C. From records that have come down to us, it seems that he placed himself under the protection of Hiram of Tyre. This Phoenician alliance sustained him and was the essential element of success for his son Solomon. The history of David is a tale of constant assassinations and executions. It reads more like the history of a savage chief rather than a civilized monarch. This story is related to us in the second book of Samuel

King David stands out in Biblical history as a great warrior of his people. He subdued the enemies of Israel and raised his nation to its highest point of eminence. Israel became the dominant power in western Asia. He gave powerful and dynamic leadership to his people and he showed considerable wisdom in dealing with matters of agriculture. He instituted civilized justice and his organization of religious life became a pattern for generations to come.

Particularly at this vantage point, it is difficult if not impossible to separate the man as a warrior and a statesman. In reading history it becomes obvious that David was a brave and patriotic as well as a remarkable ruler. David was a man who was not without weaknesses. For him the depths of iniquity brought about correspondingly greater heights of penitence with a desire for pardon, purity and communion with God. It is represented that it was the flaws in his character that prevented him from further work on the temple. That may have been or it may have been the conditions that existed at the time. This is largely a matter of the judgment of the individual. It is, however, a fact that David did not complete the temple.

It was left to his son, Solomon, to complete the building of the temple. Solomon came to the throne with the kingdom established and the enemies of Israel crushed. The reign of David is thought of as being of prominence and power and the reign of Solomon as being triumphant. Solomon was, in his earlier years, a man of great wisdom. Many stories have come down to us to illustrate the compassionate wisdom of Solomon during his earlier years. He carried for the development of the kingdom beyond that of David. If David did create an Israelitish nation it was left to Solomon to create an Israelitish state. The Golden Age of Hebrew history was that of the reign of Solomon. The building of the Temple of Solomon was his great achievement. This was one of the greatest architectural achievements of civilization up to this time.

The first Temple of Solomon was a small oblong building about fourteen meters in height with interior dimensions of about nine by twenty-eight meters. On the east face of the building was a porch which was about four-and-a-half meters wide and extended across the breadth of the building. At the entrance were two pillars made of cast brass and were cast in the plain of Jordan in the clay-ground between Succoth and Zeradatha. Those pillars were dimensioned in cubits. The cubit was a very ancient measure of length which represented between 457 and 559 centimeters. It is thought that this measurement had its origin in the length of the arm of a man, the king, from the tip of the middle finger

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to the end of his elbow. This would equate to a modern measurement of eighteen to twenty inches or forty-five to fifty-one centimeters. Again, it is difficult to reckon these measurements accurately in modern terms.

The pillars have been reported to have been  $17\frac{1}{2}$  cubits in height, 12 cubits in circumference and four cubits in diameter. The pillars were formed hollow the better to serve as archives for therein were deposited the constitutional rolls of the workmen. Being formed hollow, their outer rim or shell was four inches or a hands-breadth in thickness. Over the centuries the pillars have been subjected to repeated analysis due to their massive size. It has been established that they weighed some 242,550 kilograms each in modern measure.

The two pillars were adorned by two chapiters, each being five cubits in height. The word chapter is a corruption of the Latin word column and refers to the capital of a column. Those columns were further adorned by two spherical balls upon which were delineated the celestial and terrestrial spheres. It has been estimated that the chapiters and balls represented an additional weight of 66,150 kilograms. In all this would be some 308,700 kilograms each.

If the pillars with chapiters and balls had been cast as a unit this would have represented a total height of some 11.89 meters. It has been opined that the casting was done in several sections. This is not beyond the realm of possibility. If this were to have been the case it certainly would have been a very sophisticated job to cast each section so as to exactly interface with the matching sections. Casting sections of the total pillars would have simplified the task but it still would have been a tremendous job of casting.

In either case of their construction, the pillars would have had to be either erected or placed in position at the Temple. The erection of these was an immense job in any eventuality. The pillars provided a dramatic impression on anyone viewing or entering the Temple.

The building itself was divided into two chambers with a partition that was of olive wood. The room on the east corresponded to the Holy Place in the tabernacle. The west chamber was referred to by a word which has since been corrupted to the word oracle, which is of Greek extraction. In modern interpreted Biblical studies the word 'oracle' is derived from I Kings 6:16. Quite obviously the word oracle was not the original term for this room. This room was referred to as the Holy of the Holies (I Kings 6:2,20,21).

Flavius Josephus, in his memorable document, ANTIQUITIES OF THE JEWS, gives us further

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details. Josephus is very specific as to the time when the Temple of Solomon was built. He tells us, "Now, therefore, the king laid the foundations of the temple very deep in the ground, and the materials were strong stones, and such as would resist the force of time; these were to unite themselves with the earth, and become a basis and a sure foundation for that superstructure which was to be erected over it; they were to be so strong, in order to sustain with the east those vast superstructures and precious ornaments, whose own weight was to be not less than the weight of those other high and heavy buildings which the king designed to be very ornamental and magnificent. They erected its entire body, right up to the roof, of white stone; its height was sixty cubits, and its length was the same, and its breadth twenty." Josephus goes on, ". . . And as he enclosed the walls with boards of cedar, so he fixed on them plates of gold nailed upon them; so that the whole temple shined, and dazzled the eyes of

such as entered, but the splendor of the gold that was on every side of them. Now the whole structure of the temple was made with great skill of polished stones, and those laid together so very harmoniously and smoothly, that there appeared to the spectators no sign of any hammer, or other instrument of architecture; but as if, without any use of them, the entire materials had naturally united themselves together, that the agreement of one part with another seemed rather to have been natural, that to have arisen from the force of tools upon them."

Early in his reign Solomon murdered his brother who had sought the throne but quailed and made submission. This eliminated a future threat to Solomon. At that time religion had a relatively weak hold upon the racially and mentally confused Hebrews. This is evidenced by the ease with which Solomon replaced the hostile chief priest with his appointee Zadok. This is further strikingly evidenced by the murder of Joab by Benaiah, who was Solomon's chief ruffian. This murder occurred in the tabernacle while the victim was claiming sanctuary. At the moment of his murder Joab was holding the very horns of Jehovah's altar.

It was during this period that Solomon sought to recast the religion of his people. He continued the alliance with Hiram, King of Tyre as being of mutual advantage. Hiram provided great financial support as well as providing transport for many of the supplies required for the building of the Temple. The general area of Jerusalem provided little if any of the supplies required for the task. Even to this day the setting of Jerusalem is sparse in that there are few crops and little of economic value in the region. In this respect little has changed to this day.

Neither Solomon's establishment of the worship of Jehovah in Jerusalem upon the establishment of this new Temple, or his vision of and conversation with his God at the time of the opening of his reign stood in the way of his development of a sort of flirtation in his declining years. Solomon had a number of wives. Some of the wives are considered to have been a matter of state and splendor. It was his habit to entertain his wives by sacrificing to their national deities. This meant some form of obedience to the Sidonian goddess Ashtaroth (Ishtar), to Chemosh (a Moabitish god), to Moloch, and so the list continues. The Biblical account of Solomon shows him as an unstable and in no manner more religious man than any other. His people were as superstitious and as mentally confused as any of the other peoples in the surrounding world.

The building, completion and dedication of the Temple of Solomon required seven and one-half years. It was indeed a marvelous tabernacle. He even raised the golden throne of Solomon which was most beautifully wrought. Even in the midst of this opulence he was melancholy. He lived mostly alone understood and loved by few. Great was the hatred directed against him. Solomon had very mixed feelings regarding his chief architect Hiram Abif. He had a deep and abiding envy of Hiram Abif's genius and glory.

One affair of considerable interest, and of considerable relationship to the Temple of Solomon, is that of his marriage (if it would be called such) to the daughter of Pharaoh. The Tell-el-Amarna letters witness that in the great days of Amenophis III, of the XXIst Dynasty, Pharaoh could condescend to receive Babylonian princesses into his harem but he refused absolutely to grant so divine a creature as the

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Egyptian princess in marriage to the Babylonian monarch. This points to a dramatic decline of Egyptian prestige that now, a matter of three-hundred years later, such a petty monarch as Solomon could wed on equal terms with an

Egyptian princess. This princess, Balkis, is often referred to as the Queen of Sheba.

Sheba was called Saba and as such it was an ancient kingdom of southwestern Arabia. It is now known as the Yemen Arab Republic. The main renown of Sheba today is in reference to the Queen of Sheba. It is obvious to the most casual observer that the practices of marriage were dramatically looser than are now common. Balkis was the daughter of Pharaoh and also the Queen of Sheba.

"And when the Queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the Lord, she came to prove him with hard questions. And she came to Jerusalem with a very great train, with camels that bare spices, and very much gold, and precious stones, and when she was come to Solomon, she communed with him of all that was in her heart. And Solomon told her all her questions: there was not any thing hid from the king, which he told her not." (I Kings 1-3). \* Solomon was seated on a throne of gilt cedar wood. He was arrayed in cloth of gold, so that at first she seemed to behold a statue of gold with hands of ivory. Solomon received her with every sort of festive preparation. He led her to behold his palace and then the grand works of the Temple. At these presences Balkis was lost in admiration. The king was clearly captivated by her beauty and in a short time offered her his hand. Balkis was pleased to have conquered his proud heart and she accepted his hand. Their troth was solemnized by the presentation of a ring by the Queen of Sheba to Solomon. \* (See Ref.1)

On again visiting the Temple Balkis repeatedly requested to meet the architect who had wrought such wondrous things. Solomon delayed this meeting as long as possible but finally he found it necessary to accede to her request. At the command of the king, Hiram Abif was brought into the presence of Balkis, queen of Solomon. Hiram looked deeply into the soul of Balkis. Upon recovering from this unforeseen occurrence she regained her composure and questioned as well as defended Hiram from the ill-will and rising jealousy of Solomon. When Balkis requested to see the countless host of workmen that had created the Temple, Solomon protested that it was impossible to assemble them all at one time. There had been seventy-thousand involved in his projects. At this protestation Hiram Abif leaped on a stone to make himself more visible and with his right hand described in the air the symbolical Tau and immediately the men hastened there from all parts of the works into the presence of their master. Seeing this the queen wondered and secretly repented her choice of a husband. She felt that she was in love with the mighty architect.

Seeing the affection of Balkis for Hiram Abif, Solomon set out to destroy it. He prepared for the humiliation and ruin of his rival. To this end Solomon employed three fellow-crafts who were envious of Hiram. The reason for their envy was that Hiram had refused to raise them to the degree of master due to their lack of knowledge and their idleness. They arranged for the fall of their master, Hiram.

The plot was that Hiram was to be present and in control of a flow of molten bronze to create a brazen sea. At the appointed day the stage was set and Solomon and his beautiful wife, Balkis, were present for the pouring of the bronze. The restraining doors which contained the steaming molten liquid were opened and the torrents of liquid fire poured into the vast mould wherein the bronze sea was to be formed. Instead of containment, the liquid steaming bronze overflowed the edges of the restraints and flowed like lava over the adjoining places. The observers were now a terrified crowd and they fled from the advancing stream of fire. Hiram, calm as a god, endeavored to arrest the advance of the molten bronze with great quantities of water. This was without

success and steam filled the room and there was rain in the form of fire from heaven. The dishonored artificer needed the sympathy of a faithful heart. He sought Benoni, a young worker. The youth had perished in the inferno in his attempt to stem the tide of molten bronze when he discovered that Solomon had done nothing to hinder it.

Hiram could not remove himself from the scene of the disaster. Oppressed with grief he had heeded not the danger. He had thought that the Queen of Sheba was in danger. Balkis had come to  
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admire and congratulate him on his great triumph. She had seen nothing but disaster. Suddenly Hiram heard a voice from above crying, "Hiram, Hiram, Hiram". As he raised his eyes he beheld a gigantic human figure. The apparition continued, "Come, my son, be without fear, I have rendered thee incombustible; cast thyself into the flames." Hiram threw himself into the furnace and where others would have found death he tasted ineffable delights. Nor could he, drawn by an irresistible force leave it. He asked him who drew him into the abyss "Whither do you take me?". The reply came, "Into the center of the earth, into the soul of the world, into the kingdom of great Cain, where liberty reigns with him. There the tyrannous envy of Adonai ceases; there we can, despising his anger, taste the fruit of the tree of knowledge; there is the home of thy fathers." "Who then am I, and who are thou?" replied Hiram. The voice continued, "I am the father of thy fathers, I am the son of Lamech, I am Tubal Cain."

"Hiram was introduced, by Tubal Cain who was the first artificer in metals, into the sanctuary of fire where he expounded to him the weakness of Adonai and the base passions of that god, the enemy of his own creature whom he condemned to the inexorable law of death to avenge the benefits of the genii of fire had bestowed on him." In finality, Hiram was told that, "a son would be borne unto thee whom thou shalt indeed not see, but whose numerous descendants shall perpetuate thy race, which, superior to that of Adam, shall acquire the empire of the world; for many centuries they shall consecrate their courage and genius to the service of the ever-ungrateful race of Adam, but at last the best shall become the strongest, and restore on the earth the worship of fire. Thy sons, invincible in thy name, shall destroy the power of kings, the ministers of the Adonais' tyranny. Go, my son, the genii of fire are with thee!" Hiram was restored to the earth. I, Tubal Cain, before quitting him, gave him the hammer with which he himself had wrought great things, and said to him: "Thanks to this hammer and the help of the genii of fire, thou shalt speedily accomplish the work left unfinished through man's stupidity and malignity." Hiram did not hesitate to test the wonderful efficacy of the precious instrument, and the dawn saw the great mass of bronze cast. The architect felt the most lively joy and the queen exulted. The people came running up, astounded at this secret power which in one night had repaired everything.

By this means the reputation and stature of Hiram Abif had been restored and he met with great favor in all hearts except that of Solomon. One day Balkis, accompanied by her maids, went beyond Jerusalem and there encountered Hiram who was alone and thoughtful. This encounter was decisive. They mutually confessed their love. Had-Had, the bird who filled with the queen the office of messenger of the genii of fire, seeing Hiram in the air make the sigh of the mystic-T, flew around his head and settled on his wrist. At this Sarahil, the nurse to the queen, exclaimed: "The oracle is fulfilled. Had-Had recognizes the husband which the genii of fire destined for Balkis, whose love alone she dared accept!". Hesitation was gone between the two lovers. They mutually pledged their vows and deliberated how Balkis could retract the promise she had given to

King Solomon.

It was their decision that Hiram would be the first to quit Jerusalem. Balkis, though impatient, would meet him in Arabia after eluding the vigilance of the king. She would accomplish this by removing the ring from his finger when he was overcome with wine. By this means she would withdraw the troth that had pledged to him.

Solomon, on his part, hinted to the three fellow-crafts that the removal of his rival would be acceptable to him. This was Hiram Abif who had refused to give the secrets of a master to the three fellow-crafts. As the result, when Hiram made his rounds on an appointed day the three fellow-crafts assailed him in sequence and the third ruffian killed him with a setting maul. Immediately before his death Hiram managed to throw the golden triangle he had about his neck in a deep well. The master architect was dead.

In due course the Temple of Solomon was completed without Hiram Abif. The Tabernacle of Moses and its holy relics were lodged in the Temple. King Solomon, in a general assembly, dedicated and consecrated it by solemn prayer and costly sacrifice praising Jehovah when fixing the Holy Ark in its  
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proper place, and the Lord was pleased to fill the Temple with a cloud of glory.

More facts regarding the Temple of Solomon are revealed to us in Kings I-II. We are advised that the furnishing of the Temple were magnificently created in carvings, jewels, marble, gold and silver, bronze and brass and tapestries of fine silk and wool. Most of the walls, such as The Holy Place, were entirely covered in hammered gold, as was the floor. The Ark of the Covenant was made in pure gold and held the two tablets of stone containing the Ten Commandments. There was a molten tank which was a large circular tank of bronze created by Hiram of Tyre. It was sixty feet in circumference, twenty feet in diameter and ten feet high. The brim was the thickness of a hand-breadth. The Great Sea, as it was called, rested upon twelve bronze bulls, three each facing in the four cardinal directions of the compass -east, west, north and south. Such were the furnishings in the interior of King Solomon's Temple

\* (ref.1. The Secret Societies of All Ages and Countries, Charles William Heckethorn, Vol. II, University Books, Copyright 1965, Book XI, Section 1, 385, p.6.