

**The 2nd Degree Tracing Board –
Some Interesting items of Curiosity not
elaborated during the presentation**

By Allan de Luca

For most of us, who have now passed to the sublime degree of a Master Mason, we should have certainly spent time in the studies of the Second Degree, and again most of you would have had the opportunity of listening to a presentation and explanation of the Second Degree Tracing Board by a member of your Lodge after the ceremony of Passing.

This paper is an attempt to present some more information on that explanation which is not mentioned during the presentation of the Second Degree Tracing Board. The references to certain events, and the winding staircase, that are mentioned during the explanation.

For example, why were the molten bronze pillars cast in clay ground between Succoth and Zeredathah on the banks of the Jordan? Who was Jephthah the renowned Gileaditish general, and what do we know about him and what role did he play against the Ephraimites? Was there a winding staircase leading to the Middle Chamber when King Solomon built the Temple?

Firstly let's look at the clay ground between Succoth and Zeredathah. This is the place we are informed in the Scriptures where Hiram Abif cast all the sacred vessels of the Temple, as well as the pillars of the porch. This spot was about thirty-five miles in a northeast direction from Jerusalem: and it is supposed that Hiram selected it for his foundry, because the clay which abounded there was, by its great tenacity, was peculiarly fitted for making moulds.

The Masonic tradition on this subject is sustained by the authority of Scripture (see First Kings vii, 46 "*in the plain of Jordan did the king cast them, in the clay ground between Succoth and Zarthan*", and Second Chronicles iv, 17 "*In the plain of Jordan did the king cast them, (in the clay ground between Succoth and Zeredathah*").

Even in the 19th century this clay was being used by jewellers to reproduce small pieces of brass and jewellery, in a technique that has not been changed in 4000 years. A wooden model of the piece to be cast is made, perfect in all its proportions. This is placed in a box, and clay packed tightly around it. The mould is then separated, the model removed and the edges of the mould carefully aligned. A small channel is cleared, and the heated molten metal slowly poured in, filling all the void areas. Upon cooling the clay is removed and the casting cleaned up and adjusted, ready to take its place in the overall sculpture, where the pieces are brazed together.

The two great pillars were an exceptional example of casting skill, as they were hollow, with the sides 4 inches thick, 27 feet high and 18 feet in circumference, or thereabouts. Dimensions vary, but the basic size remains incredible, as was the undertaking that produced them. Let's move on to one of the other characters mentioned in the explanation of the Second Degree Tracing Board. Jephthah, the renowned Gileaditish

General. Jephthah in the period of the book of Judges in the Old Testament, was born in the land of Gilead of a father who was also called Gilead and a mother who was a harlot. His half-brothers by his father's lawful wife drove him away, lest he *should* share the inheritance with them. Jephthah fled eastward to the land of Tob, on the edge of the desert. Here he became leader of a robber band of destitute men who had gathered around him. He became known as a skilled and daring fighter, "a mighty warrior" (Judges. 11:1) – "*Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty man of valour, and he was the son of an harlot: and Gilead begat Jephthah*". The elders of Gilead sought him out and urged him to lead their forces against the Ammonites, who were encroaching on their territory. Jephthah retorted with some bitterness: Judges 11:7 *And Jephthah said unto the elders of Gilead, Did not you hate me, and expel me out of my father's house? And why are ye come unto me now when ye are in distress?* However, he agreed to accept the appointment on condition that if they were victorious, he would remain the tribal leader. The undertaking was solemnly endorsed at Mizpah ("watchtower") where the Israelite defenders had mustered.

On assuming command, Jephthah at first attempted to come to terms with the Ammonites by peaceful means. He sent a delegation to their king, proposing that their forces be withdrawn. In his reply, the Ammonite ruler laid claim to all the Israelite territory, to the south of Gilead, between the Arnon and Jabbok rivers, occupied by the tribes of Gad and Reuben. Jephthah sent his envoys back to prove that there was no historical basis for this claim, since the Children of Israel under Moses had taken the area from the Amorites under King Sihon, who had barred their transit. Since then the Israelites had lived in these territories for three hundred years "*why did you not recover them within that time? Wherefore I have not sinned against thee, but thou doest me wrong to war against me*". (Judges 11:26.27) *(In the Old Testament we are informed that when the children of Israel reached the Arnon River east of the Dead Sea, they found that the country beyond it had recently been conquered by the Amorites under King Sihon. Moses sent messengers asking for leave to pass through and promising not to stay on the King's Highway. Not only was his request turned down, but "He gathered all his men together, and went out against Israel". The battle took place at Jahaz and Sihon was beaten. The Israelites overran his land from the Arnon river to the Jabbok river, including, Hesbon, Sihon's capital. His territory, together with that of Og, King of Bashan, who was also defeated, was allocated to the tribes Reuben, Gad and half of Manasseh. (Numbers Chap: 22 vs.: 21:25). There are other frequent references to the defeat of Sihon in Books of the Old Testament).*

However, the king of Ammon rejected Jephthah's diplomatic overtures, and hostilities broke out. Jephthah marched south in a wide sweep to attack the Ammonites from the rear. Before going into battle, he took a vow that if he won he would sacrifice to the Lord "whoever comes forth from the doors of my house to meet me, when I return victorious" (Judges 11:31). With the Ammonites repulsed, Jephthah returned in triumph, and to his horror the first person who came to meet him was his daughter, an only child, dancing to the sound of timbrels (tambourines). Jephthah tore his clothes and cried out in grief; but even his daughter agreed that his sacred oath could not be broken. At her request, he sent her away for two months. On her return, the sacrifice was carried out. From this tragic

episode the custom arose for the young women to go out each year for four days, mourning Jephthah's daughter.

A quarrel then broke out between the men of Gilead and the tribe of Ephraim across the river. The Ephraimites advanced eastward into Gilead, but Jephthah drove them back towards the river and sent detachments ahead to cut them off at the fords. Those men who sought to cross denied that they were Ephraimites and were asked to say the word *Shibboleth*, which means an "ear of wheat", "ear of corn" or even "stream in flood". If they pronounced it *Sibboleth*, according to the dialect of Ephraim, they were slain on the spot. Thousands of Ephraimites lost their lives in this ill-advised expedition. Judges 12:6: "Then said they unto him. Say now *Shibboleth*: and he said *Sibboleth*; for he could not frame to pronounce it right. Then they took him, and slew him at the passages of Jordan: and there fell at that time of the Ephraimites forty and two thousand".

One of the many features of King Solomon's Temple is still shrouded in some mystery and its authenticity still remains incomplete. In the Second Degree there is the reference to the winding staircase, which we are led to believe existed in King Solomon's Temple. There is but one reference to the winding staircase in the ritual, and is the central feature which every Fellow Craft must symbolically ascend in order to make his advancement in the degree. "They then passed into the middle chamber to receive their wages".

There are references in three different books of the Old Testament. The widely accepted version is that found in the First Book of Kings, and probably would be the oldest and most reliable description we have of the Temple. The passages relevant to the winding staircase are found in Kings I, Chapter 6, within verses 1 : 8. Verse 1 "*And it came to pass in the four hundred and eightieth year after the Children of Israel were come out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel, in the month of Zif, which is the second month, that he began to build the house of the Lord.* Verse 5 "*And against the wall of the house he built chambers round about, against the walls of the house round about, both of the temple and of the oracle; and he made chambers around about;* Verse 7 "*And the house, when it was in building, was built of stone made ready before it was brought thither: so that there was neither hammer nor axe nor any tool of iron heard in the house, while it was in building.* Verse 8 *The door for the middle chamber was in the right side of the house: and they went up with **winding stairs** into the middle chamber, and out of the middle into the third.*

If we look at the description which places the entrance door for the middle chamber in the right side of the building, and it continues by stating that the stairway went from the door to the middle chamber and on up to the third chamber. There is no mention of an entrance on the ground floor. The second Bible reference is in Chronicles, Book II, Chapter 3, verses 1-9. Although these verses are comparable to those contained in Kings, there is no reference to the chambers, except for verse 9, which states "*and the weight of the nails was fifty shekels of gold. And he overlaid the upper chambers with gold*". There is also no mention of the winding staircase.

The third description is found in the book of Ezekiel, who is a prophet of the Babylonian exile, a well-respected priest who was one of the first group of deportees to Babylonia, and lived there in a refugee community. He organized religious observance and established religious laws. He also lived at the time which would have enabled him to have seen King Solomon's Temple, however, at the time of his writings, the Temple had been destroyed by the Babylonians.

In Ezekiel, Chapter 41, verse 6 - *“And the side chambers were three, one over another, and thirty in order, and they entered into the wall which was of the house for the side chambers around about, that they might have hold, but they had not hold in the wall of the house”* Verse 7: 1 *“And there was an enlarging, and a winding still upward to the said chambers; for the winding about of the house went still upward round about the house; therefore, the breadth of the house was still upward, and so increased from the lowest chamber to the highest by the midst.*

Was he saying that the chambers themselves wound about the house in long galleries? Or does he mean encircle? Ezekiel makes no reference to a staircase. In the 1924 translation of the Bible, verse 8 in Kings was revised to read “The entrance into the lower side rooms was on the south side of the Temple; you climbed to the middle row, and from the middle to the top row, through trap doors.”

In 1965 another translation was published in an English Edition of the “Jewish Bible” with verse 8: *“The entrance to the lower storey was at the right hand corner of the Temple and access to the middle storey above was by trap doors and so from the middle storey to the third”*. Again there was no reference to winding stairs.

If the Temple had a winding staircase, it was probably in the sidewalls and served the side chambers built into the thickness of the walls from the first to the second levels. These side chambers were used while the Temple was being built for the purpose of paying the workmen their wages. Later, they were used as store-houses or treasury rooms of the Temple into which the treasures and gifts to the Temple were placed. Josephus, an ancient Jewish historian, wrote, *“The King also had a fine contrivance for an ascent to the upper room over the Temple, and that was by steps in the thickness of its wall; for it had no large door on the east end, as the lower house had, but the entrances were by the sides, through very small doors”*.

However, regardless whether there was a winding staircase, a trap-door or just an opening to the different compartments of the Temple, the mystery still remains, and will continue to fascinate scholars and archaeologists alike and of course is of most interest to those in our Fraternity.