

## Chapter 2

# The Temple

For over two hundred years, the majority of freemasonic ritual and institutions have been based on the allegorical Legend of the Temple of Solomon. Many Freemasons believe the Legend has always occupied this core position. However, this is not the case.

Before the 19<sup>th</sup> century C.E., Freemasons traced the beginning of the Order to the Tower of Babel, and the first symbolic Grand Master was King Nimrod. While King Solomon and his Temple were mentioned, they were not portrayed as the source of origin, but as a secondary center of transmission.

King Nimrod of Babylon was acknowledged as the source of the original “Charge” or rule of conduct for “operative masons” (actual stone masons), and “taught them signs and tokens, so that they should distinguish one another from all the rest of mankind...”<sup>1</sup> These charges, signs and tokens were later transmitted, by King Solomon,<sup>2</sup> to the operative masons working on the Temple in Jerusalem.

This version of the Legend can be traced back as far as the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, and was not rejected until the end of the 18<sup>th</sup>, when it was replaced with the familiar Legend of the Temple of Solomon.

Freemasons place great emphasis on the immutability of their traditions. However, the fact that the focus of the Legend was changed once, gives credence to suggestions that it was changed even earlier. Judging from the past, it is likely that

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<sup>1</sup> The Thistle MS, Herbert Poole, AQC xxxv, 41, 43

<sup>2</sup> Or Grand Master Hiram Abiff. Versions of the Legend differ.

those traditions will be further adapted in the future.

A brief review of the background of the Temple allegory will help us understand it by placing it in the context of its times.

### The Archeology

The archeological research related to the temple is much too long and involved to do more than sketch here.

Through the 19<sup>th</sup> and well into 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, archeologists assumed that the “Old Testament” account was basically true, and interpreted their findings accordingly. By the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century most archeologists were moderating this opinion, stating that parts were historically correct while others were not. The majority of the older archeologists and Biblical scholars were still of this opinion at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, many younger scholars and archeologists are reinterpreting the evidence, and arriving at some surprising conclusions. Some of them are perhaps over-enthusiastic in their newfound intellectual freedom, but they do provide new insights.

Some of the younger researchers claim that the preponderance of current scientific evidence indicates that there is no proof that the Jews ever wandered in the wilderness, casting serious doubt on the “forty years” between the “Egyptian enslavement” and the invasion of the “promised land”.<sup>3</sup>

These researchers indicate that in the 10<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E. (when David and

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<sup>3</sup> The primary difficulty with the period of wandering in the wilderness is that there is no evidence of a long encampment at the foot of Mt. Horev, where YHWH appeared to Moses in the burning bush, gave him the Ten Commandments, and the Hebrew tribes were long encamped. However, there is some speculation that the mountain has been mis-identified, which would remove this problem.

Solomon ruled), the southern “kingdom” of Judah consisted of a few small villages. There were no towns or cities, and Jerusalem was then, at best, merely another small village. Estimates place the total population of Judah at around 20,000, and there is no evidence of literacy, or a central government or religion, until two centuries later.<sup>4</sup>

While there is some evidence that the “House of David” existed, there is no evidence that its ruler was more than a local chieftain, until at least the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E.

Of course, a lack of evidence does not prove anything. However, its absence gives us a means of distinguishing between that which is historical fact and that which *may* be pure allegory.

By the 7<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E. Jerusalem was a city, the hub of a small nation, dominated by a Temple to God (YHWH). However, that was approximately 300 years after the time of Solomon.

If this is correct, then in the time of David and Solomon, Jerusalem was at best a village, and Judah a loose confederation of villages. Judah was not an empire, and Solomon could not have had the resources to build anything like the great Temple described in the Bible. Thus, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, we may presume that the Biblical tale of the Temple of Solomon is most likely not history, but an ancient allegory, a tradition that Freemasonry has adapted and continued.

This process of illustrating spiritual principles via allegory is common to all the

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<sup>4</sup> For further information see: *The Bible Unearthed*, by Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman, The Tree Press, NY

world's great religions and spiritual paths. In the ancient mystery traditions, the higher Truth was first illustrated in allegorical tales, then experienced in symbolic rituals, and finally known through inner realization. In this context, the historical accuracy of the story, or lack thereof, has no relevance to the universal truths it illustrates.

### The History of the Legend

One of the great questions of Freemasonry is when and how this allegory became a part of our tradition.<sup>5</sup> The earliest references appear to be in the “Old Charges” (documents that were read to new members of the old operant craft lodges, instructing them in the traditions of the craft). The oldest surviving Old Charge that actually refers to the Temple is the Cooke MS, which has been dated at around 1410 A.D.<sup>6</sup> However, that mention is quite brief.

The evidence suggests that the Temple Legend remained quite simple until the late 17<sup>th</sup> or early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries (when the Temple replaced the Tower of Babel). It then accumulated details, until it matured into the modern version by the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Thus, the present form of the Legend is a relatively recent development. However, this does not affect its value as a spiritual teaching.

It has been suggested that the Hebrews learned the mysteries during their enslavement in Egypt, and that their early rites were largely Egyptian in form. In this

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<sup>5</sup> *King Solomon's Temple In The Masonic Tradition*, by Alex Horne, The Aquarian Press, London, 1972, discusses many of these possible sources.

<sup>6</sup> The existing M.S. is a copy of an older version that no longer exists. However, internal evidence indicates that the section that gives an account of King Solomon's Temple was originally written between 1350 and 1390.

argument, the primary initiation “Temple” of those rites is presumed to have been the Great Pyramid in Egypt, making it the “earliest Temple” of the Legend.

However, while Judah was within Egypt’s area of influence, there is little evidence to support the idea that the worship in Jerusalem began as an extension of the rites of Egypt. The rites that prophets such as Ezekiel railed against were those of more local deities, such as Ba’al, Ashe’rah, Tammuz, and the “host of heaven”<sup>7</sup>, not those of Isis, Osiris, Horus, etc.

It has also been suggested that the Jews learned the mysteries during the Babylonian captivity. While their religious practices were probably altered by the captivity, the architecture of the Temple suggests a pre-existing relationship with the religious practices of their more immediate neighbors. The Hebrews did not build pyramids or ziggurats, but temples much like those (in internal and external form) of their more immediate neighbors (such as the Temple of Melqart in Tyre).

The ancient mysteries originate in the experience of spiritual growth and development. That process is both enhanced by and reflected in the rituals of the mysteries, including those of Freemasonry.

The change of the central symbol of Freemasonry, from the Tower to the Temple, supports the idea that the Legend of King Solomon’s Temple is an allegory. What the Order changed was not the purpose or meaning of the myth, but the symbols of that meaning.

## The Symbols of The Temple

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<sup>7</sup> Ezekiel 8: 5–18; 2 Kings 23:4–7

The Temple was located on the crest of Mount Moriah, a hill neighboring Jerusalem, the City of David.<sup>8</sup> A wall with three gates (to the west, east, and south) surrounded the Temple.<sup>9</sup> Inside the wall was a broad courtyard. The Temple sat in the north side of the courtyard, and faced the south gate. Two large ritual objects sat in the courtyard in front of the Temple. The object slightly to the west was the Brazen Sea,<sup>10</sup> a very large ritual bowl. The one slightly to the east was the sacrificial altar, also of brass. Surrounding the temple itself were a number of raised metal bowls, which the priests used for cleansing sacrifices and themselves.

The Temple floor was raised above the level of the courtyard, and twelve steps led up to its porch or entrance (sometimes called the outer chamber). To either side of the entrance sat a large brazen pillar. Inside, in the middle chamber, a winding stair led to the upper rooms. Ahead, a doorway led to the inner chamber, the Holy of Holies where the Ark of the Covenant was kept.

The features that are important to us at this point include the location, gates, twelve steps, two columns, winding stair, three chambers, Ark of the Covenant, and the three Temples.

## The Three Temples

A deep examination of the actions and penalties of the workers reveals that the

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<sup>8</sup> 2 Chronicles 3:1 “Then Solomon began to build the house of the LORD in Jerusalem on Mount Mori'ah, where the LORD had appeared to David his father, at the place that David had appointed, on the threshing floor of Ornan the Jeb'usite”

<sup>9</sup> There is disagreement about the orientation of the Temple and the location of the gates. The story in chapter one and the explanation above uses the Biblical description (with the Temple in the north and the entrance facing south). This version has Hiram Abiff fleeing from the south gate to the west and then to the east, or clockwise. The meditations place the Temple in the east, and have the candidate walking toward the light of the rising sun.

<sup>10</sup> Although “brass” is mentioned a number of times in the Old Testament, it is unlikely that it refers to the alloy of zinc and copper presently identified by that name, as zinc was not “discovered” until the late Middle Ages. It is likely that bronze or copper was meant.

Freemasonic degree system represents three overlapping stages of spiritual growth.

Those stages are:

- Personal improvement
- Soul (the consciousness or true self)
- Spirit

Each of these stages has three sub-stages within it. They overlap in the sense that one begins Soul development while concluding personal growth, and begin Spiritual development while concluding that of the Soul.

The nature of one's experience of the Freemasonic rites, and interpretation of the symbols, depends on where one is in one's growth and development.

- If you are identified with and as your persona, then you will interpret the rituals (and the degrees) in personal terms.
- If you are identified with and as your Soul, then you will interpret the rituals in terms of your identity in the One Life.
- If you are identified with and as your Spirit, then you will interpret the rituals in terms of your purpose within the One Life.

In the Bible, as in some other systems of spiritual development, these three stages of growth are set in three different structures. However, in modern Freemasonry, these three structures have been conflated into a single allegorical Temple. This simplifies the symbolism, and gives the Temple of Solomon multiple levels of meaning. Unfortunately, it also makes the symbol of the Temple much more difficult to understand.

The symbolic meaning of the Temple will be easier to understand if we split the one Temple into three allegorical temples, or one setting for each of the three stages of growth. We will be guided in our choice of additional settings by the biblical myth of the Temple.

The Bible indicates that the Temple of Solomon was not the original place of worship of the Hebrews. During the forty years in the wilderness (between the escape from Egypt and the conquest of Palestine) they worshiped in the Tabernacle or Tent of Appointment, a temple of wood and fabric that could be disassembled and moved from place to place.

It appears that when the Hebrews settled in Palestine, they worshiped at a number of types of locations:

- Major cult centers: These were usually ancient holy sites, and often included a temple, a large altar for burnt offerings, their own god (such as an El or Baal), and a college of priests. The Temple of Solomon was originally one of a number of such spiritual centers. Other possible center locations include: Bethel, Bethlehem, Dan, Gibeah, Gilgal, Mizpah, Nob, and Silo.<sup>11</sup>
- Local incense altars set up in:
  - “High places” throughout the land, also including a cult object such as a tree, pole, or column.
  - Public areas in towns and villages
- Small incense burners set up in private homes, often including Teraphim

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<sup>11</sup> Bethel (Amos 7.13), Bethlehem (Judg. 19.18), Dan (Judg. 18.30-31), Gibeah of Saul (2 Sam. 21.9), Gilgal (1 Sam. 11.15), Mizpah of Benjamin (Judg. 20.1), Nob (1 Sam. 21.1-6), and Silo (1 Sam. 1.9;3.3).

(small figurines representing goddesses or ancestral deities).

The Temple in Jerusalem (the place of peace) did not become the central place of worship for some centuries. According to the Bible, King Solomon built it in the 10<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E. The Legend indicates that it took 7 years and 6 months to build, and stood for 33 years before being pillaged by the Egyptians.<sup>12</sup>

King Josiah “restored” the Temple of Solomon in the 7<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E. However, some suggest that Josiah did not merely repair a derelict building, but built a larger edifice than the original, and that it is Josiah’s temple that is the basis for the Biblical descriptions of King Solomon’s Temple. In any case, Josiah’s temple was later destroyed by the Babylonians.

During the Babylonian captivity, the Jews would have seen the Tower of Babylon. This tower was roughly pyramid shaped, with seven terraces and a small shrine on top. A design called a ziggurat. The Babylonian name for the tower was *Etemenanki*, which meant “*the house of the foundation of heaven and earth*”.<sup>13</sup>

The Jews rebuilt the Temple after the return from the Babylonian captivity. If Josiah’s temple was the first actual Temple, then this rebuilt Temple was the second Temple in Jerusalem. The second Temple was also destroyed. A third temple was later built by King Herod, only to be razed by the Romans.

During the Babylonian captivity, the prophet Ezekiel had a vision of a heavenly temple.

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<sup>12</sup> The number 33 appears to be symbolic. King Solomon ruled for 39 years, from 970 – 931 B.C.E. He began construction in the 5<sup>th</sup> year of his reign, completing it in the 13<sup>th</sup> year. Thus, the Temple was looted in the 4<sup>th</sup> year of Rehoboam’s reign (Rehobam 931 – 914).

<sup>13</sup> Quote from: *The World Book Encyclopedia*.

The actual temples may be considered to have been those of King Josiah, the one rebuilt after the Babylonian captivity, and King Herod's. This leaves us with three, presumably allegorical temples, including:

- The Tabernacle
- King Solomon's Temple
- Ezekiel's Temple

These allegorical temples are symbols of a single structure, depicted as three separate structures in order to match our experience. We may safely consider them entirely allegorical, as there is no hard evidence that any of these three temples were ever physical buildings!

The Temple Legend combines the three structures of our human experience back into a single building, the Temple of Solomon. This has produced a great deal of confusion around the meaning of the Temple. This confusion will be alleviated if we view the Temple as one structure with three levels of expression. How we experience that structure depends on how we approach it:

- If we approach it as the persona (body, emotions, and mind) we see the Tabernacle. The three initiations then represent the spiritual progress of the persona, or body, emotions, and mind.
- If we approach it as the Soul, we see the Temple of Solomon. The three initiations then represent the spiritual progress of the Soul.
- If we approach it as the Spirit, we see the Temple of Ezekiel. The three initiations then represent the progress of the Spirit.

At this point, the question is: What do these three allegorical temples represent?

Our quest continues with an examination of the meaning of their shared architectural features, including: An outer wall, a courtyard, twin pillars, and three chambers. We will, of course, begin with the first of the three structures, the Tabernacle.

## Purification Technique

Our next exercise is an alignment of the body, emotions, and mind, with the growth and development offered by the ancient mysteries.

◆ Opening alignment:

- Sit in a comfortable chair with you back straight, your feet flat on the floor and your arms in your lap or on the arm rests. Place *The Temple and The Word* in your lap or (if its weight is distracting) within easy reach.
- Close your eyes and relax your physical body, beginning with your toes and moving upward to your head. You may command each portion to relax, imagine a relaxing warmth or tingling sensation, or use whatever other method works for you. Include every portion of your body and pay special attention to the muscles of your diaphragm, throat, tongue, jaw, and behind the eyes. Complete the relaxation with your attention focused in your head and endeavor to remain there throughout the projection.

◆ Imagine yourself in the shadow of the wall, before the gate.

- Step forward, knock on the gate, and step back.
- When the portal opens, take three steps into the courtyard of the Temple.
- Walk up to the Laver (basin), gaze inside, and calm your emotions by picturing them as the perfectly calm clear pool of water.
- Remove all your clothes and jewelry and rub your body with salt.
- Dip a ladle into the Laver, and pour water over your head and shoulders.
- Pick up your raiment (clothes and jewelry), turn to the Altar and lurch over

to it.

- ◆ Slow as you approach the Altar, noting that the brazen block rises above your waist. Wood kindling waits atop it, carefully stacked with plenty of room between the faggots. A clump of dry moss, a stone, and an iron knife sit to one side.
  - Set down your raiment and pick up the clump of dry moss.
  - With trembling fingers, carefully shove it into the cracks in the bottom of the stacked wood. When the moss is ready, pick up the iron knife with your left hand, and jab it into the moss, point down.
  - Still holding the knife, pick up the stone with your right hand and carefully strike it against the knife, a glancing downward blow toward the moss. Once, twice, thrice, and sparks leap forth.
  - Lean forward and gently blow on the sparks as they char the moss. The sparks flare brighter, and smoke wafts up. Continue blowing, until flames erupt.
  - Stand back and watch the blaze grow. Gaze into the dancing flames, and then watch the cobalt smoke as it wafts upward into the azure heavens. Feel the heat on your face, the backs of your arms, and the other parts of your body nearest the crimson flames.
- ◆ Aspire upward toward heaven, the home of your Spiritual Soul. When that aspiration has reached its height, audibly state the seed-thought:

*\*“I invoke the Light of the Ancient Wisdom into my consciousness, truth is revealed to me and I am transformed.”\**

Hold that thought for at least a minute, then:

Recognize that the clothing and jewelry you are clutching represent portions of your life and affairs that you must release before you can take the next step in your path of spiritual growth and development.

Dedicating your life and affairs to your quest, grasp an item of raiment, recognize what it represents, and toss it into the flames of the Altar.

- Finally dry, warmed by the flames and rising sun, turn to the Temple, and begin walking toward the steps of its entrance.
- Take a deep breath, drop the image, and open your eyes.

Continue to the next chapter.

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