

Short Talk # 5

TEMPLE & TABERNACLE

When was the last time you attended a degree in a Blue Lodge or sat through the conferral of the Royal Arch degree, or maybe taught an Entered Apprentice his proficiency work?

All these activities have a common link to each other, or should I say, two indivisible places that bind them into our Great System of Symbolism we cherish in Freemasonry. Those 2 places are the TEMPLE & TABERNACLE.

By studying the Old Testament in the Bible, our basis for Ancient Craft Masonry, we find the TEMPLE & TABERNACLE, the physical manifestations for our purposes, or one might picture them as the settings for our lessons in morality. To this end, we will discover how the TEMPLE & TABERNACLE relate to Royal Arch Masons and their teachings.

First, let me define which Temple along with what Tabernacle we will be exploring. Let us consider the Tabernacle first because it is the foundation for the Temple. (Remember your questions and answers as an Entered Apprentice?)

What is a Tabernacle? Who used it? What purpose did it serve? In the Old Testament, God's chosen people, the Israelites, were freed from Egyptian slavery and their lives and futures saved. Their leader Moses was instructed to build a place of Worship of the One True God. Just think about it - these Israelites had just left Egypt where they had built the Egyptian temples to worship Isis or Ra, not their God. Now, God commissions a Tabernacle.

The Tabernacle was a large tent-like structure that translates to mean "The Tent of Meeting." But meeting with whom? Did the Israelite leaders have something similar to a Indian Pow-wow? No, the Tabernacle was a place where God's Spirit was manifest or lived, and the place where the Israelite would meet his Creator.

The state of the Tribes of Jacob at that point in history was that of wandering in the desert, or being nomadic and constantly moving from place to place. God knew their needs, so He designed for them a mobile place of worship, the Tabernacle. He adorned it with specially colored linens and vessels along with

furniture of great wealth, a place fit for His Presence. The Tabernacle represents the first restoration of the Physical Presence and Assurance of God to his people since He was with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. This same type of restoration is a common theme in all the Capitular degrees of Freemasonry, namely restoring the relationship of God with His People through worship.

The Tabernacle being divided by veils restricts access to God by the mass of people and shows us a picture of offerings to His Holiness. The Tabernacle was the place where the believer in the ONE TRUE GOD received atonement for sins and mercy. So, why did Zerubbabel employ The Tabernacle? Was not his ultimate goal to restore the worship of the ONE TRUE GOD? Although rebuilding Solomon's temple was his final goal, the spiritual preparation of the returning Israelites was not to be delayed in Zerubbabel's wisdom and obedience to God.

Temple worship was originated with King David, Solomon's Father. David being a warrior was not fit in God's eyes to build a Holy Temple, but was given the commission and plans to build it. The actual construction was left to Solomon. In our Blue Lodges,

we are taught about the framework and symbols related to this “Most Stupendous Edifice.” In our Mark Master degree, we learn of the strict specifications for building materials for the Temple. Remember how some stones are accepted and others rejected? (Are not our lives accepted and rejected in God’s eyes?) In our Most Excellent Master degree, the day of Solomon’s goal, a completed Temple, is celebrated with awe and wonder. Reflect upon the significance of God’s Spirit taking up residence in a Nation, imagine the feeling among the people. Through the Royal Arch ritual, we look back to this time when the zenith of the Jewish people, Solomon’s Temple was destroyed. The tribes of Israel had repeatedly sinned against God and had been punished by being exiled into Babylon.

Zerubbabel is the champion of the rebuilding of the Temple. He gains the blessing of Darius, the Persian King to travel back to Jerusalem for this purpose. But on a deeper level, The Second Temple of Zerubbabel represents God’s forgiveness and providence for the Jewish people, a way back home into their rightful place. Zerubbabel does complete his Second Temple and ruled until his death. But later in Jewish History, the people and

their leadership again turn away from God and are disciplined by being invaded by the Romans.

So, as Ancient Craft Masons, we should look to these two powerful buildings as symbols of God's Blessing and Providence. We should imitate the founders of our Masonic Arts by building in each of us a Temple (a permanent place for God) and a Tabernacle (a place to meet and worship God) to discover the very nature of Deity to reveal Himself by His method of self-disclosure in dwelling within Mankind, just as we see exemplified in our Craft degrees.

In conclusion, I offer this portion of a prayer found in a old Royal Arch ritual:

"And since sin has destroyed within us the first Temple of purity & innocence may thy Heavenly Grace guide and assist us in rebuilding a second Temple of reformation and may glory of this latter house be greater than the glory of the former. Amen"

THE FREEMASON'S MONITOR by Thomas Smith Webb circa 1818

Discussion Questions

1. Trace the work as we perform it in the Most Excellent Master Degree, Royal Arch Degree, and Super Excellent Master Degree, and compare it with what we read in the Bible. Where are the similarities? Where are some differences? What liberties do our degrees take with the Holy Scriptures – either in changing, rearranging, adding, or omitting events?
2. Why do you believe that our ritual states that “Solomon was the wisest of Princes?” What evidence do you see that indicates his wisdom in action? How critical were his judgments?
3. Zerubbabel is considered the “signet of truth.” Why? What evidence is there that he should have been regarded so highly?