

## **ROYAL ARCH BANNERS Part 2**

**This Royal Arch short talk is a continuation of Part 1. In Part 1, you learned how the banners representing some of the Tribes of Israel were used in the setup of a Royal Arch chapter room. This practice was more commonplace circa 1880-1900. Further, you saw how the history of the twelve Tribes of Jacob/Israel established a historical basis for this continuation.**

**In Part 2, we will explain the Biblical and Masonic connection to the lives of these Historic figures, along with their importance in each and every one of our pursuit toward edifying our Masonic building of knowledge. The four principal banners represented in Texas Royal Arch Chapters in years gone by were the leading Standards of the four divisions of the army of Israel. They bear the symbols of a Man, a Lion, an Ox, and an Eagle. These symbols or devices are derived from two of the most prophetic and mystical books of the Holy Bible, namely Ezekiel and Revelation. In these books of Holy Scripture, The Lion represents the Tribe of Judah, the Man that of Reuben, the Ox, Ephraim and the Eagle, Dan.**

**The Lion represents strength and power, the Ox symbolizes patience and great care or attention to detail, the Man gives reference to those most human of qualities: intelligence and understanding, while the Eagle represents promptness and quickness in action. The Book of Revelation depicts the**

**Emblems as four distinct beings; the Old Testament shows them as one being with four faces on four heads.**

**The Ensigns arranged around the Altar are said to commemorate the Children of Israel during their forty years travel in the wilderness as lead by Moses and Aaron. Tradition holds that in the course of which the banners were regularly set up, and the Tribes assembled and pitched their tents around their own individual banner.**

**The Encampment of Israel practiced in the wilderness between Egypt and Canaan was of Divine direction and earthly doing.**

According to the Scriptures of Moses, this layout of the Twelve Tribes gave daily order and community to a nation of over 600,000 men, along with women and children totaling over a million souls. These were the Israelites delivered from Egypt at the exodus. They came out of Egypt in this manner while continuing their journey to the Promised Land. Our banners' positioning is emblematic of how the wilderness tribes would camp around the Tabernacle which housed the Ark of the Covenant in God-specified locations (Exodus 12: 37-38). As explained in Part 1, the identification of the Twelve Tribes dated back to the time of Jacob and his sons and grandsons over 400 years earlier in Jewish history. While enslaved in Egypt, the families of Jacob's sons lived in a community according to their heritage; these tribes associated with Reuben, Dan, Judah, Joseph, and so forth. Therefore, the Almighty, who is a God of Order, provided a system to sustain the movement of one million of his chosen people through the wilderness. Each of the twelve tribes had a specific area of the camp to live in (Joshua 7:14).

So if there were twelve tribes, why did the Texas ritual only chose to incorporate four? The answer lies in a couple of contributing factors. One factor is Biblically based, in how the twelve tribes governed themselves under Moses. In their positions of encampment, these twelve tribes were divided into four larger groups of three tribes each. Each tribe was divinely situated at a certain distance around the tabernacle. The four governing tribes of the four groups [Judah](#), [Reuben](#), [Ephraim](#) and [Dan](#) were recognized as tribal leaders.

Thus, just like the arrangement of a Blue Lodge in the tradition of the Tabernacle and Solomon's Temple, the Masonic use and custom of the placement Jewish tribal banners near the altar associated with the veils of Zerubbabel's tabernacle have a distinct symbolism.

[Judah](#) took a place of prominence by occupying the greatest area and being on the eastern side facing the tabernacle entrance behind the tents of [Aaron or Levi](#), the tribe of the priests. To their right was the tribe of [Issachar](#) and on the other side [Zebulun](#) on the east numbering 186,400 men. [Reuben](#) (with [Simeon](#) and [Gad](#)) was stationed in the south numbering 151,450 men. The West was occupied by the offspring from Jacob's wife Rachel, that of [Ephraim](#) (with [Manasseh](#) and [Benjamin](#)), numbering 108,100 men. On the north side was Dan (with [Asher](#) and [Naphtali](#)) numbering 157,600 men. This brought the

**total count of men twenty years and upwards to 603,550, not including the tribe of Levi.**

**I see a Masonic connection so ironic in this positioning it is astounding. The tribes stationed in the East, West, and South were: Judah, the prophesied tribe of the Messiah-promised future leader (Worshipful Master), Ephraim, Jacob's grandson by Joseph his favorite (Senior Warden), and Reuben, first born of Jacob (Junior Warden). In the ultimate symbolism by Divine command, the Tabernacle itself was always found in the very center of the camp with the tents of the various tribes set up at a certain distance. This is to teach us that we should keep our worship and reverence for God central in our lives while protecting or surrounding it by like an army of thousands (Numbers 2:2).**

**Next, I would like to explain the Banners themselves. Jewish Tradition holds that the banners were as follows:**

**Judah - East (Lion of [gold](#) with a [scarlet](#) background).**

**Ephraim - West (Ox of [black](#) on [gold](#) background).**

**Reuben - South (Man on [gold](#) background).**

**Dan - North (Eagle of [gold](#) on a [blue](#) background).**

**The principal factor involved beside the Biblical background is medieval chivalry and its use of banners. The Banners come into Freemasonry from exposure to them in church as well as high civic settings. Banners hold great significance when displayed in the chapels or in the meeting of certain Orders of Knighthood. Other factors are Masonic history and lore. One mystical speculation which cannot be confirmed is stated in a series of articles on "The Royal Arch Banners." There it is proposed that at the rebuilding of the Second Temple under Zerubbabel, Haggai, and Joshua such banners were displayed on the site. Thus, we can commemorate the last era, before the Modern Day Nation of Israel, when history shows a Jewish nation ruled by self governance which is a tenet of our Masonic philosophy.**

**This two-part essay has briefly attempted to cover a rich subject of Royal Arch symbolism that has fallen out of use in a vast number of our modern Texas chapters.**

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