

A COMPARISON OF THE BIBLICAL AND MASONIC ACCOUNTS OF THE BUILDING OF KING SOLOMON'S TEMPLE

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The paper offers a comparison between the account of the building of King Solomon's Temple in Masonic Ritual and the accounts given in the Old Testament of the Bible. Its intent is to condense the information regarding the adaptation of the story of King Solomon's Temple in Masonic Ritual into one paper so that Masonic Brethren can study and compare the two accounts more easily. It concludes that while many similarities between the Biblical and Masonic account of this event exist, there are also some discrepancies.

KING SOLOMON'S TEMPLE

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Introduction

Once upon a time, when I was receiving the three degrees of Masonry, an old friend informed me that everything in the Masonic ritual could be found in the Bible. He was right, much of what is found in the ritual may be discovered in the Old Testament. However, the scriptures present two different accounts of that primary Masonic allegory: the building of King Solomon's Temple.

The two accounts of this temple's construction can be found in 1 Kings and 2 Chronicles. The historical accounts presented in both books are very similar. However, there are some discrepancies in some of the details of the story. For instance, it is common to find differences in the quantities presented in the two different accounts.

The discovery of Masonic ritual in scriptural readings has always been particularly fascinating to me. It is exciting to know a secret meaning regarding scripture, particularly when surrounded by those unaware of its relevance to the private order of Freemasonry. However, it is surprising that many Masons never take the time to examine the information presented in Masonic rituals in its original context. It can be an enlightening experience to discover both the accuracy of Biblical accounts in Masonic ritual as well as discover the discrepancies between the Biblical and Masonic accounts of these events.

Both the Hebrew history found in the Old Testament and the Masonic ritual are subject to the errors of oral communication. The Old Testament was written down only after many years of oral communication which eroded the details of the original eye witness accounts. Likewise, Masonic ritual has been subject to errors of the same nature over time and the fact that the ritual has been continually revised and abridged for several centuries. Due to the presentation of the ritual by memory, the Masonic initiate may receive inaccurate information that he may never discover to be in error unless he conducts his own research on the subject.

This paper offers no new information or exciting conclusions. It is simply condensing information that is in many places into one to allow the Mason easy access to discover the story of King Solomon's Temple as told in the Bible. It will prove most enlightening if the reader keeps a translation of the Old Testament at hand so that Biblical references may be quickly accessed.

The Bibles used in compiling this paper are the New International Version Study Bible edited by Kenneth Baker published by Zondervan Publishing House in 1995 and the Holy Bible King James Version published by Heirloom Bible Publishers 1988. The Masonic ritual used as a reference is the ritual authorized for use by the Grand Lodge of South Dakota.

Entered Apprentice Degree: Historical Lecture

The historical lecture found in the Entered Apprentice degree seeks to use the historical accounts found in the Hebrew traditions to rationalize the events which occur in the first degree. The first reference to King Solomon's Temple in this lecture regards the fact that the stones taken from the quarry were properly hewn and squared at the quarry and not at the construction site at the temple.

“You were divested of all metals for two reasons: First that you might carry nothing offensive or defensive into the Lodge; second, at the building of King Solomon’s Temple, there was not heard the sound of an ax, hammer, or any tools of iron. The stones were all hewn, squared and numbered at the quarries where they were raised...”

Indeed, this can be found in the 1 Kings account of the construction of King Solomon's Temple. 1 King 6:7 reads, “In building the temple, only blocks dressed at the quarry were used, and no hammer, chisel or any other iron tool was heard at the temple site while it was being built.” Therefore, this fact is taken directly from the Old Testament. The following excerpt from the first lecture of the Entered Apprentice degree explains the method by which the lumber for the temple was transported to Jerusalem.

“The timbers felled and prepared in the Forests of Lebanon. conveyed by sea in floats to Joppa, thence by land to Jerusalem, where they were set up with wooden mauls prepared for that purpose; and when the building was completed, its several parts fitted with such exact nicety, that it had more the appearance of the handy-work of the Supreme Architect of the Universe than of human hands.”

This part of the historical account may be found in King Hiram's response to King Solomon in 1 Kings 9:9. The final sentence of this excerpt from the ritual appears to be an addition designed to glorify the workmanship of the craftsmen which labored on the temple. Perhaps it is meant to stress the importance of the symbolic lessons which can be learned from the building of King Solomon's Temple.

The historical lecture of this degree refers to the Mason's apron with the following statement:

“You were presented with a lamb-skin or white leather apron, because the lamb has, in all ages, been deemed an emblem of innocence; he therefore, who wears the lamb-skin as a badge of a Mason is thereby continually reminded of that purity of life and conduct, which is so essentially necessary to his gaining admission to that Celestial Lodge above, where the Supreme Architect of the Universe presides.”

This makes no mention of any Biblical reference, which indicates that the wear of the apron by speculative Masons as well as the manner in which the apron is worn is in fact a Masonic invention. The ritual of the first section of the degree supports this by saying that “Masonic tradition informs us that at the building of King Solomon’s Temple, the workmen were known or distinguished by the manner in which they wore their aprons.” Indeed, an examination of the accounts of the construction of King Solomon’s Temple shows that the apron of the craftsmen is never mentioned.

The lecture also contains two other statements that appear to have no Biblical basis. First, the lecture states that guards were placed at the east, south, and west gates of King Solomon’s Temple. No mention of these gates is made in the accounts of King Solomon’s Temple provided in scripture. The lecture also mentions that the first stone of the foundation of a building is placed in the northeast corner. No Biblical account of the building of the temple mentions the placement of the first stone and therefore this statement is derived solely from the tradition of operative Masons.

Entered Apprentice Degree: Illustrated Lecture

The second lecture in the first degree is said to relate more particularly to the lodge. It is no surprise then, that its contents relies heavily on the Biblical account of King Solomon’s Temple in order to rationalize the forms, supports, covering, furniture, ornaments, lights, and jewels found in the lodge.

It is said that the “form of the Lodge is an oblong square, extending from East to West and between the North and South, from the center to the

surface, and from the earth to the highest Heaven.” The information regarding the shape and orientation of the lodge does indeed originate from the Biblical accounts of King Solomon's Temple. The measurements of the temple in the Old Testament say that it was “sixty cubits long, twenty wide and thirty high (1 Kings 6:2).” 2 Chronicles gives the same dimensions for the length and width of the building. Therefore, the shape would be an oblong square or rectangle. The orientation of this building requires a study of the pillars at the entrance of the temple. While these pillars will be discussed in more detail in the section pertaining to the Fellowcraft degree, it is necessary to have a brief discussion of their position here to prove the lodge's orientation.

The New International Version of the Bible states that “He erected the pillars at the portico of the temple. The Pillar to the south he named Jachin and the one to the north Boaz (1 Kings 7:21).” However, this does not clearly define which way the temple was oriented. Luckily, the King James Version provides some light to this confusion. The same verse in the King James Version reads “And he set up the pillars in the porch of the temple: and he set up the right pillar, and called the name thereof Jachin: and he set up the left pillar and called the name thereof Boaz.” So the north pillar was also the left hand pillar which means that the temple did face the east. The ritual states that the temple faces east because it was modeled based on the tabernacle. While this is a likely assumption, the idea that the temple was built based on the tabernacle is not expressly written in the Old Testament.

The illustrated lecture specifies the ornaments of the lodge as the mosaic pavement, indented tessel, and blazing star. The blazing star is stated in the ritual as being a Masonic symbol. However, the ritual says that, “The Mosaic Pavement is a representation of the ground floor of King Solomon's Temple; the Indented Tessel, of the beautiful tessellated borders or skirting which surrounded it.” In 1 Kings 6:15, the New International Version of the Bible specifies the flooring for the ground floor of the temple as pine and the King James Version specifies fir as the flooring of choice. However, in the opening of lodge Entered Apprentice, the Senior Warden says that he was made an Entered Apprentice “In a regularly constituted Lodge of Entered Apprentices, duly assembled in a room or place representing the ground floor of King Solomon's Temple.” So the comparison of the flooring of the lodge to the flooring of King Solomon's Temple is probably a statement which means that a lodge of Entered Apprentice represents the ground floor of King Solomon's Temple and the word 'mosaic' has nothing to do with the actual flooring of the temple.

The indented tessel is an adaptation of the description of the temple given

in the Old Testament. 1 Kings 6:15 says, "He lined its interior walls with cedar boards, paneling them from the floor of the temple to the ceiling..." Verse eighteen of the sixth chapter of 1 Kings says that, "The inside of the temple was cedar, carved with gourds and open flowers." This would indicate that the walls were decorated. So the statement "the Indented Tessel, of the beautiful tessellated borders or skirting which surrounded it," is referring to the decorated walls found in the temple.

The final specific reference to the actual construction of King Solomon's Temple in the first degree refers to the lights of the lodge. Masonic ritual states that "A Lodge has three lights, situated East, West and South – none in the North, because of the situation of King Solomon's Temple, that having been situated so far north of the elliptic, that the sun or Moon at meridian height could dart no ray of light in the north part of it." The temple did have windows as specified in 1 Kings 6:4. However, this excerpt from the ritual deals with the geographic location of King Solomon's Temple. The temple was built at Jerusalem. Geographically, Jerusalem is positioned north of the equator as well as north of the Tropic of Cancer. Therefore, the sun or moon would never be positioned north of the temple and no light would ever enter directly through the windows on the north side of the temple, even at meridian height.

Fellowcraft Degree: Middle Chamber Lecture

The Middle Chamber Lecture is littered with references to King Solomon's Temple. The first reference to the construction of King Solomon's Temple details the working habits of the craftsmen who built the temple. The ritual says "They worked six days before receiving their wages, but did not work on the seventh, for in six days God created the Heaven and the earth, and rested upon the seventh day." This is doubtlessly a reference to the fourth commandment which reads "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God (Exodus 20:8)." As this commandment was Jewish law at the time of the building of King Solomon's Temple, it is certain that the craftsmen conformed to this regulation.

The next section of the Middle Chamber lecture gives a detailed description of the pillars at the entrance of King Solomon's Temple. The ritual states:

“The first thing that attracts your attention, as we advance, is a representation of two brazen pillars, one on the left hand, the other on the right. The one on the left hand is called BOAZ and denotes strength; that upon the right is called JACHIN, and denotes establishment; together, they allude to a promise made by God to David that in strength would He establish his kingdom. The pillars which these represent were cast in the clay grounds on the plains of Jordan, between Succoth and Zeredatha where all the Holy Vessels for King Solomon’s Temple were cast, by one Hiram, a widow’s son, of the tribe of Naphtali”

The King James Version of the Old Testament affirms the name and position of the pillars in 1 Kings 7:21. The word Jachin is defined as he establishes and the word Boaz is defined as in him is strength in the notes found in New International Version of the Bible. This is said to allude to a promise made by God to David. This can be found in the seventh chapter of 2 Samuel. While the specific phrase “in strength would He establish his kingdom” does not appear, the chapter features the promise which the Lord made to David. The Lord reminds David of the strength that he has provided by cutting off David's enemies and making him king. Therefore, the Lord would indeed establish a kingdom for David and David would build him a “house of cedar.” This is obviously a reference to King Solomon's Temple and serves well to tie the meaning of the pillars into the story. However, nothing is mentioned in the books of 1 Kings and 2 Chronicles of the pillars' allusion to this promise. It is therefore a Masonic conjecture.

The Old Testament confirms the location and manner of the pillars' construction. 1 Kings 7:46 reads, “The king had them cast in clay molds in the plain of the Jordan between Succoth and Zarethan.” In the King James Version, 2 Chronicle 4:17 describes the location as being between Succoth and Zeredathah. Therefore, the various spellings of this place can be attributed to different translations. The pillars were cast in this location along with a number of other items that were created to adorn the temple.

The builder of the pillars was a man named Hiram. 1 Kings 7:13-14 says “King Solomon sent to Tyre and brought Hiram, whose mother was a widow from the tribe of Naphtali and whose father was a man of Tyre and a craftsman in bronze.” The 2 Chronicles account of this bronze worker describes him as Hiram Abi and of his lineage it says “Whose mother was from Dan and whose father was from Tyre (2 Chronicles 2:14).” It is interesting to note that the Danites were located near the Sidonians, a Phoenician people (Judges 18:7). This would make the widow's relationship to a man of Tyre very

reasonable. However, she could have been a member of the Tribe of Naphtali living in Dan. It is an interesting conflict between the two accounts with no absolute explanation to be found in scripture. The account of the man named Hiram in 2 Chronicles expands the breadth of his expertise. King Hiram says of the craftsman, "He is trained to work in gold and silver, bronze and iron, stone and wood, and with purple and blue and crimson yarn and fine linen. He is experienced in all kinds of engraving and can execute any design given to him. He will work with your craftsmen and with those of my lord, David your father." Therefore, Hiram was a jack of all trades, he was the artificer designated to craft all of the decorative adornments for the temple.

The pillars are described in detail in the Masonic ritual. The following excerpt is the Masonic account of the appearance of the pillars.

"They were cast hollow, the better to serve as a safe repository for the archives of Masonry against all inundations and conflagrations. They were thirty five cubits in height, twelve in circumference, or four in diameter, to which were added chapters of five cubits each making in all forty cubits. These chapters were adorned with lily work, net-work and pomegranates, denoting peace, unity and plenty. The lily, from its purity and the retired situation in which it grows, denotes peace; the net-work, from the intricate connection of its parts, denotes unity; and the pomegranate, from the exuberance of its seeds, denotes plenty. The chapters were further adorned with pommels on the top representing globes, which denote Masonry universality."

No mention is made in the Bible of the pillars being cast hollow. This would make sense because the large pillars would be far more expensive and would be of an incredible weight if they were not cast hollow. However, the phrase "the better to serve as a safe repository for the archives of Masonry" indicates that this is a Masonic assumption on the construction and purpose for the pillars. There is certainly no mention made of any archives deposited into the pillars.

The Old Testament features conflicting accounts of the height of the pillars. The King James Version of 2 Chronicles 3:15 says "Also he made before the house two pillars of thirty and five cubits high, and the chapter that was on the top of each of them was five cubits." However, in 1 Kings the pillars are said to be "each eighteen cubits high and twelve

cubits around, by line. He also made two capitals of cast bronze to set on the tops of the pillars; each capital was five cubits high (1 Kings 7:15-16).” No conflict ever arises around the measurement of the diameter of the pillars.

It is interesting to note that the New International Version states that the pillars “together were thirty-five cubits.” The notes of that text point out that the word 'together' was added to reconcile the difference in the measurements of the two versions. This is doubtlessly only speculation on the true value of the measurements as two different quantities are provided in scripture. Yet another different account of the dimensions of the pillars exists. In 2 Kings 25:17, the height of the capitals are given as three cubits in the King James Version. Stranger still, the New International version lists the measurements given in 2 Kings in feet, although the measurements given in this version are the correct size. The New International Version of the Bible does not give a conclusive answer to who authored these books. However, this version does say the books of 1 Kings and 2 Kings are actually part of the same work which indicates that they had the same author. While the tradition of communicating history orally was common at this time, it is certainly odd that one author would provide two different measurements of these pillars. The true dimensions therefore, are unknown.

The chapters were adorned with lily work, net work, and pomegranates. 1 Kings 7:17-19 mentions these three types of adornments found on the chapters. However, 2 Chronicles 3:16 makes no mention of lilies on the chapters. This discrepancy may be attributed to the fact that the two books were created from two different oral accounts of the temple. The meanings attributed to these adornments are Masonic in origin. Scripture describes the shape of the chapters as “bowl shaped(1 Kings 7:41).” This indicates that the pillars perhaps supported a roof and did not terminate in the spherical globes mentioned in Masonic ritual. The ritual says that, “These globes are two artificial spherical bodies, on the convex surfaces of which are represented the countries, seas, and various parts of the earth, the face of the Heavens, the planetary revolutions, and other important particulars.” There is absolutely no evidence in the Old Testament that there were representations of the globe or the celestial bodies on the pillars built by the widow's son.

After learning about the pillars at the entrance of the temple, the lecture proceeds to discuss a winding staircase consisting of three, five, and seven steps. If one reads the account of the temple in the New International

Version, he may well be confused as to where the Bible speaks of the winding stairs. This version mentions only a stairway which led from the ground floor to the middle level. However, in the King James Version, the winding stairs can be found. 1 Kings 6:8 says, "The door for the middle chamber was in the right side of the house: and they went up with winding stairs in into the middle chamber, and out of the middle chamber into the third." No mention is made anywhere in the Bible of the stairway consisting of three, five, and seven steps. This is a Masonic addition and a number of articles have been written on the meaning of these numbers. This paper will not attempt to address the symbolism of the number of steps because that explanation requires a volume of its own.

At this point, it is necessary to explain the arrangement of the floors King Solomon's Temple. The New International Version of the Bible provides an explanation of the arrangement of the temple which can be difficult to compare with Masonic teachings. The King James Version provides an easier text for which the arrangement of the temple in Masonic ritual may be studied. Chapter 6 of 1 Kings explains the arrangement thus:

"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 round about: The nethermost chamber was five cubits broad and the middle was six cubits broad, and the third was seven cubits broad: for without in the wall of the house he made narrowed rests round about, that the beams should not be fastened in the walls of the house...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." (1 Kings 6:5-8)

The 'house' is the inner sanctuary of King Solomon's Temple, or the Sanctum Sanctorum. The ground floor and middle chamber which are referred to in the Masonic degrees were actually side chambers built around the Sanctum Sanctorum. There were three levels of outer chambers. The ground floor and the middle chamber are mentioned in Masonic ritual and the third floor is neglected.

The next part of the lecture is a journey through the inner and outer doors of the middle chamber. From the earlier discussion on the orientation of the temple, it is understood that the direction referred to as 'right' in the King James Version is the southern direction. Therefore, the entrance to the

outer door was situated in the south and corresponds with the Junior Warden's station as the representation of the outer door as his station resides in the south. Judging from scripture, it would appear that the discussion of the outer door should come before the section on the winding staircase. No discussion of an inner door takes place in scripture and therefore it is Masonic tradition that it exists at the west side of the chamber.

When in the chamber, the recipient of the lecture receives the wages of a Fellowcraft: corn, wine, and oil. This comes from the agreement made between King Solomon of Israel and King Hiram of Tyre. King Hiram says to Solomon, "Now let my lord send his servants the wheat and barley and the olive oil and wine he promised (2 Chronicles 2:15)." While no mention of corn is made, it can be assumed that this was simply a substitution for wheat and barley as it is another staple grain. Therefore, the Masonic definition of the Fellowcraft's wages are indeed the same wages that the Old Testament confirms were given to the craftsmen at the temple.

The last mention of King Solomon's Temple in this lecture occurs during the discussion on the letter 'G' as the initial of geometry. This lecture mentions that King Solomon's Temple "escaped not the unsparing ravages of barbarous force." It is true that the temple was destroyed. 2 Chronicles 36:18-19 says, "He [Nebuchadnezzar] carried to Babylon all the articles from the temple of God, both large and small, and the treasures of the Lord's temple and the treasures of the king and his officials. They set fire to God's temple and broke down the wall of Jerusalem; they burned all the places and destroyed everything of value there."

Master Mason Degree: The Hiramic Lesson

This paper will not cover the Hiramic Legend of this degree, because it is just that: a legend. The historic lecture also summarizes this story. The proof that it is only a legend can be found in the Biblical account of the construction of King Solomon's Temple. The historic lecture begins by stating that Hiram, the craftsman, was killed prior to the completion of the temple. However, this is not in agreement with the Old Testament. Both 1 Kings and 2 Chronicles state that Hiram completed the work that he had undertaken for King Solomon in 1 Kings 7:40 and 2 Chronicles 4:11. The details pertaining to his assassination are entirely Masonic in origin.

Master Mason Degree: The Illustrated Lecture

The introduction of this lecture deals specifically with the building of King Solomon's Temple. The ritual says that, "This magnificent structure was supported by 1453 columns and 2906 pilasters, all hewn from the finest Parian marble."

Scripture is silent on the number of columns and pilasters and the belief that Parian marble was used is certainly perplexing. Parian marble comes from Paros and would require a long voyage across the seas to be delivered to Jerusalem.[1] The Old Testament speaks only of the transportation of the lumber from Lebanon. Such a great undertaking as importing marble from Paros would be a point of pride and it is odd that such a detail is not included in the Hebrew traditions. Therefore, this belief is a Masonic development.

The lecture gives the following numbers for the workers at the temple: There were employed in this building, 3 Grand Masters, 3,300 Masters or overseers of the work, 80,000 Fellow Crafts, and 70,000 Entered Apprentices, or bearers of burdens." While the three Grand Masters are not specifically referred to with that title in the Bible, King Solomon of Israel, King Hiram of Tiro, and Hiram Abif are the three main characters in the construction of King Solomon's Temple. It is interesting to note that King Solomon was a Jew, King Hiram a Phoenician, and Hiram Abif a man of mixed birth (as discussed earlier in the paper). This lays the foundation for the idea that Masons need only to believe in a Supreme Being and not in a specific doctrine. Because at least one man (and probably two, depending on which of his parent's religions Hiram Abif accepted) who was intimately involved in building King Solomon's Temple was not a Jew, it would be absurd for Masons to limit their membership to one religious discipline when the allegory which they base their order on contains men of different religions. Also, three different nationalities of men were employed as craftsmen during the project. 1 Kings 5:18 says, "The craftsmen of Solomon and Hiram and the men of Gebal cut and prepared the timber and stone for the building of the temple." So the construction of the temple was certainly a multicultural affair. This certainly provides an excellent allegory on which the universal Brotherhood of Masonry can base its teachings.

The book of 1 Kings confirms the number of Master Masons, Fellowcrafts,

Entered Apprentices employed during the building of the temple. 1 Kings 5:15-16 reads, "Solomon had seventy thousand carriers and eighty thousand stonecutters in the hills, as well as thirty-three hundred foremen who supervised the project and directed the workmen." 2 Chronicles gives thirty-six hundred as the number of Master Masons employed. This is doubtlessly an error from passing the tale through oral communication.

Conclusion

The Masonic account of the construction of King Solomon's Temple presents an interesting weave of Biblical information and Masonic tradition. If a Mason took the ritual at its word and assumed that it borrowed only from the Old Testament and never invented any part of the story to enhance its symbolic meaning, he would be quite mistaken. While the ritual borrows liberally from the scriptural accounts of the project, it definitely invents a number of facts relating to the building of the temple.

However, despite the discrepancies between Masonic ritual and the Bible, perhaps the most intriguing information presented by the Biblical account of King Solomon's Temple is the universal nature of the group of craftsmen who constructed the building. More than one-hundred fifty thousand men are said to have labored on the temple. These men were of different races and creeds and constituted the craft which symbolizes our modern Masonic assemblies. They were united to build a temple to Deity, one that would become the envy of architects. It appears that perhaps the modern craft and that ancient assembly weren't so different after all.