

Building the Two Temples

At the beginning of the lecture for the Third Degree we are told that the mighty King David wished to erect a Temple to the Lord, the magnificence of which had never been seen. God, however, refused to give David permission to build the Temple because, although he was a great King, he had been a man of war. Instead, that honor fell to his son, Solomon, a wise ruler during a time of peace, who was aided in the project by Hiram, King of Tyre, who supplied materials and workmen. The dramatic action of the Third Degree takes place during the building of that Temple, and the archetype of the noble, incorruptible man is symbolized by Our Grand Master Hiram Abif. Significantly, in the Craft Degrees the Temple is not completed, symbolic, perhaps, of the ongoing process of striving toward perfection and yet never attaining it.

During the Ineffable Degrees (4th – 14th) of the Scottish Rite, however, the Temple is completed and the Lost Word, or Sacred name of Deity, is discovered. The Lodge of Perfection closes with a sense of triumph and completion. Sadly, this feeling of elation is short-lived, for the Fifteenth Degree opens with the Temple in ruins and the people of Israel captive in Babylon. At this point we are introduced to a new model of the ideal man, Zerubbabel, who is honorable, just, and brave. He wins the freedom of the people and—although he is known as a “mighty man of war” and is a leader during a time of strife—he is given permission (and even assistance) by the Babylonian monarch, Darius, to rebuild the House of the Lord.

What is going on here? Why is David refused permission to build the First Temple because he is too warlike, while Zerubbabel, also a warrior, is granted permission to build the Second Temple? In the following brief discussion I intend to show that there is a significant symbolic difference between the First and Second Temples, such that to build the First Temple a time of peace is a *requirement*, while to build the Second Temple a time of peace is an *impossibility*. Finally, I will note the symbolic implications of the fact that in both cases, the building of the Temple is facilitated by foreign rulers who are not of the Jewish faith.

Very early in the process of becoming a Mason a candidate learns about the

concept of the rough and perfect ashlar. He learns that the former is a building stone, fresh from the quarry, in its irregular and unperfected state, while the latter is that same stone after it has been shaped by the tools of the Entered Apprentice and proven true by the tools of the Fellow Craft. The tools of the first degree teach a man to measure the stone and break off the unnecessary parts, while he uses the tools of the second degree to ensure that it is plumb, square, and level (used as adjectives, not nouns). As he progresses through the degrees, reads about and discusses Freemasonry with his mentors and new Brothers, and proves himself proficient in the Work, it gradually dawns on him that he *is* the rough stone, and that one of the objects of Masonry is to give him the tools and support to *become* the perfected stone. Once realized, this idea takes root in him and suddenly all the talk of stones, tools, builders, and architecture makes sense. The work of Masonry, he thinks, is work on myself!

But the very thoughtful Mason will also come to understand why it was so important that he state his reasons for wanting to become a Mason on his petition; why men from the lodge came to meet him and discern his character and fitness for Masonry; and why he had to answer questions not only about his background, but about his current view of the Fraternity. The reason is that Masonry has a dual purpose. That rough stone, taken from the quarry, was not just any stone. It had to meet certain criteria *before* it was ever worked on; not all stones were fit to use in a building. We've all heard the words of Psalm 118:22, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone." Once chosen, the stone had to be shaped—not as an end in itself, but so that it could be used in a building. For what good is a perfect ashlar if it's not actually used for anything?

Similarly, several times during his initiation the candidate hears it asked about him, "Is he duly and truly prepared?" At first this might merely seem to mean, "Is he ready for the ceremonies? Is he hoodwinked? Barefoot? Divested of all metals?" But this question also means much more, namely, "is he duly and truly prepared mentally, emotionally, and morally for the great and important undertaking that he is about to embark on?" In other words, can this rough ashlar that we've pulled from the quarry be shaped into a stone that will be useful? If the answer is yes, then a marvelous transition of purpose takes place, and the focus moves from not only improving the individual self to

improving the whole world. One very brief part of the First Degree ritual makes this shift explicit: the placing of the candidate in the Northeast Corner of the lodge. This quick piece of ritual symbolizes that not only is the new Mason charged with working to perfect himself, but Freemasonry is laying a new cornerstone—the most important stone—upon which much will be built. Very high expectations, indeed!

Getting back to the original question at hand, the First Temple, built during the Craft Degrees, must be erected by a man of peace—the candidate himself. He must be of a temperament, and at a place in life, that will allow him to make the most of the tools of self-improvement that Masonry provides. The lessons of Masonry are lost on a life characterized by upheaval and turmoil. This is why only a man of peace, Solomon, could build this First Temple. Again, from a symbolic standpoint the “rough-ashlar-to-perfect-ashlar” work a Mason does on himself takes place mostly in the First and Second Degrees, using the twenty-four inch gauge, common gavel, plumb, square, and level. Each “stone” a man works on may represent a different aspect of his own life that is in need of improvement. By the Third Degree, the stones we’ve perfected are ready to be used for a greater purpose—building “the complete man.” This is symbolized by the Trowel, a tool not used to work on or finish just one particular stone, but to unite many stones into one edifice: our own best self.

The degrees of the Lodge of Perfection, as mentioned above, continue with the building of the First Temple and the discovery of the Lost Word. If the individual man *is* the First Temple upon which he is working, then by the end of the Fourteenth Degree he has found the lost key to the Divine deep within himself.

The Second Temple, however, is another story completely. The Chapter Degrees find the Temple in ruins and the people occupied by a foreign ruler. They want to rebuild the Temple but are prevented by the “people of the land.” We are told in the drama of the Sixteenth Degree that work on the Temple goes “painfully, and with constant interruptions. The people of the land wish to prevent our work in rebuilding the city and Temple. They come into our midst to make the work cease. Yesterday the laborers had scarcely commenced, when a force of our adversaries came suddenly through the breaches in the walls, on three sides of the city, and fell upon us” (Sixteenth Degree:

Prince of Jerusalem, Drama, p. 8).

In the lecture of the Sixteenth Degree, from *Morals and Dogma*, Brother Albert Pike tells us straightaway that this degree does not concern a literal rebuilding of the Temple of Jerusalem, but that now “to us the whole world is God’s Temple...in erecting which Masonry is now engaged” (p. 241). Pike speaks of spreading the cement of Love, Peace, Charity, and Toleration throughout the world. That is how the Second Temple will be built. But it will not be easy, for forces of hatred, violence, selfishness, and bigotry encroach on all sides. That is why the laborers on the Temple are enjoined to work with a Trowel in one hand and a Sword in the other.

It is also why, in contrast to the requirement that only a man of peace (in a time of peace) could build the First Temple, the Second Temple simply cannot wait for a time of tranquility—for it will never come. The ideal building conditions will never exist, so work must begin NOW. The man who will build this new Temple in the world must be of good and upright character, but he must also be willing to fight. Such a man is found in the main figure of the Sixteenth Degree, Zerubbabel.

It is worth noting that the Second Temple is to be built on the foundations of the First. This symbolizes yet again the idea that only those who have erected their own strong foundations of character (their personal Temple of Solomon) are fit to work on the Temple that represents the world. Deep underneath the new structure is that same cornerstone (the individual Mason) that was placed back in the First Degree, which makes the foundation strong.

While the work of the First Temple looked inward, toward the improvement of the individual Mason, the work of the Second Temple focuses outward, toward all mankind. Brother Pike tells us that the duties of a Prince of Jerusalem are “to reconcile disputes and heal dissensions, to restore amity and peace, to soothe dislikes and soften prejudices” (*Morals and Dogma*, p. 241). He further states that we are not waiting for some “big moment” to make a difference, but that in our everyday lives we will have ample opportunities to work on the Second Temple. “Varying every hour, the million occasions will come in which we may restrain our passions, subdue our hearts to gentleness and patience, resign our own interest for another’s advantage, speak words of

kindness and wisdom, raise the fallen, cheer the fainting and sick in spirit, and soften and assuage the weariness and bitterness of their mortal lot” (p. 245).

The action of the drama also illustrates how difficult it is to rebuild the Temple once it has been overthrown (*Scottish Rite Ritual Monitor and Guide*, p. 339). Symbolically this shows, on a personal level, how bitterness of their mortal lot. hard it is to rebuild one’s own reputation once it has been sullied. As Masons we need constant vigilance against the “vices and superfluities” of life to keep our Temple strong. Once we start justifying keeping extra change at the store, for example, what will we justify to ourselves next? On a national level, it could point out how hard it is to regain rights once they have been taken away. As a people we must be vigilant, for if we let our government suspend *habeus corpus*, loosen the standards of what is considered torture, and wire-tap the phones of its citizens without a warrant, there is no going back. That is, once a right is taken away, the government will not give it back, pleading “precedence.” Thus we see the wisdom of building with a Trowel in one hand, to spread the cement of Brotherly Love, and a sword in the other, to fight off the falsely righteous, the naysayers, and the critics who would stop work on the Temple.

Finally, there is the curious aspect of the building of both Temples, that aid is given by foreign rulers: by Hiram, King of Tyre, for Solomon’s Temple, and by Darius, the Babylonian King, for the Second Temple. Darius says, “Whatsoever is needed for the Holy House of their God, let it be bestowed out of our treasure house” (Drama, p. 22). Can one imagine such a thing actually happening in today’s world? As a people, we can’t even abide the idea of someone building a Muslim cultural center in New York City, let alone giving resources to build a Temple (church, synagogue, mosque, etc.) of another faith! So why is this an aspect of both Temples in Freemasonry? To me, it speaks to the tolerance of other faiths that Masonry holds so dear, and that is so lost in our age. The “treasures” that Darius refers to are symbolic of the pearls of wisdom of other faiths. If we are to build strong, beautiful Temples that will stand the test of time, we cannot rely solely on our own faiths, arrogantly believing that other religions have nothing to offer us. I am a strong Christian, but I don’t believe that I can’t learn something valuable by studying the Teachings of Buddha or the Koran. Incorporating the wisdom of other

religions into my own Temple, or recognizing the holiness of another's faith, is no more threatening to my Christianity than building with cedars from Lebanon was to the Temple of Solomon.

In conclusion, the First Temple represents our own personal character, and we needed to be in a place of peace to begin to build this inward-looking Masonic edifice. First we were "taken from the quarry" and worked to make our rough ashlar(s) smooth with the tools of the first two degrees. We were placed as a cornerstone and given a Trowel to unite our ashlar(s) with others. This laid a strong foundation. The focus of the Second Temple is outward, and it is symbolic of the world, constantly besieged by strife and attacked by those who sow discord. As Masons we work with both a Trowel and a sword to build this Temple, simultaneously spreading Brotherly Love and fending off the evils of intolerance, fanaticism, and tyranny in our everyday lives. We recognize that if we are to "establish all over the world the new Law and Reign of Love" (*Morals and Dogma*, p. 241) we must not only tolerate, but actively accept, the wisdom and holiness of other faiths without vilifying them. We further recognize that we need constant vigilance to keep our Temples strong, once they've been built, for they are easily overthrown. In the words of the Prophet Haggai, from the drama of the Sixteenth Degree, "O Zerubbabel, why are the workmen thus idle? Has the time not come that the Lord's House should be built?" (p. 14).