

Brian Ragain

College of the Consistory

Valley of Guthrie

04 June 2018

15<sup>th</sup> Degree, Knight of the East, of the Sword, or the Eagle

6. Zerubbabel is tempted three times, with gold, with freedom, and with the holy treasures of the Temple of Solomon. Discuss the symbolic meanings of these temptations. What are the symbols supposed to teach us about living ethical lives in our own time?

In this Degree, Zerubbabel, who lives in Babylon with his wife and son, is compelled to return to Jerusalem and meet with Hananiah to discuss the 70 years of slavery that the Israelites have endured in Persia. King Cyrus has made a promise to allow them to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the city and temple of their Lord. Zerubbabel informs the court that he will return to Babylon and remind the king of his promise to release the captives and assist them in the rebuilding efforts. Before he is presented to King Cyrus, Zerubbabel clothes himself in slaves garb to show the sincerity of his intentions and that he is ready to accept this fate, should the king not comply with his promise. Having refused to reveal the secrets of his Order, Zerubbabel is conducted through the treasure room by the Master of the Palace in order to attempt to bribe him with gold, freedom, and the Holy Vessels of the first Temple. These temptations have a deep and strong symbolic meaning, both to those of Cyrus' court and to Masons in current times.

The Master of the Palace tries to negotiate with Zerubbabel first with rank and gold. He argues that gold is, in fact, the king of kings. Men of all rank and status will bow to the likes of gold. It can heal any wrong and can be used to tempt even the most faithful being. Gold is the conqueror of nations and makes the wretch into a man of power. Zerubbabel counters with the argument that he who sells himself for gold throws away an eternity in Heaven for a few years of earthly joy. The symbolism behind this, besides fidelity, honor, and virtue, is consistent with Immanuel Kant's categorical imperativism. Should he sell himself for gold in order to find favor with the king, at what length does he go in regards to honor and

virtue, and at what point does he stop? If he sells his honor for gold, he has already set a price for his fidelity. He would essentially be the last slave, should the king decide to finally release the Israelites. As Masons, we should never be so hasty as to give up our integrity for personal gains. Judas performed a similar trade and for a much lower price; he sold the Son of God. The grief caused him to take his own life and not only is he forever remembered as the traitor, the field where he burst asunder is forever remembered as Aceldama, or the field of blood. The Mark Master Degree of the York Rite has a similar argument for money, although it refers to defrauding our Brethren out of the value of a days wage, so small amount as one penny, as discussed in Matthew 20. This also symbolizes the materialistic temptation of Christ in the desert.

After refusing the riches of gold, the Master of the Palace tries to tempt Zerubbabel with freedom. He reminds him of his family and how he must long for them, and how the king the power to take them from him. Not only has Zerubbabel given up a chance for rank and riches, he is now being tempted with bondage of himself and of his family. His response is that of near defeat. He explains that if he were to return to his family as dishonored and a traitor, he would never be greeted the same way and that life without honor is worthless. He has now essentially sacrificed not only personal riches but the safety and security of his family. This symbolizes self-restraint, honor, and the risk of maleficence. Selflessness does not come into play due to the potential sacrifice of his family in order to maintain his honor and fidelity. Today, this would correspond with many similar circumstances such as giving up a friend's whereabouts to the authorities, political corruption, and even speaking evil of another Brother. Zerubbabel was well aware of the consequences of his actions and the price that would possibly be paid for the privilege and responsibility of 'keeping the Holy Fire.' A person's honor and virtue must be within bounds of himself, his duty to God, and to man. This may be the most controversial temptation of them all. The other two temptations deal with the idea that noncompliance will offer no change whatsoever to anyone else's conditions. Indeed, life without honor IS worthless. This also represents the hedonistic temptation whereby Christ was tempted in the desert with saving himself.

Finally, Zerubbabel is lead into the part of the treasure room where the Holy Vessels are revealed to him. The table of show bread, the golden candlesticks, and finally the Ark of the Covenant. Zerubbabel is now face to face with the earthly object of his God. He speaks to the ark, asking it for help in resisting this temptation. This is the ultimate temptation. He now, by a violation of his vow, can ultimately return Jerusalem and his people back to their own land and rebuild the Temple. At that point, God speaks to him and the truth is revealed. Zerubbabel informs the Master of the Palace that the Israelites, along

with the Holy Vessels, will be freed and return to Jerusalem when God decides that it is time. This decision was not for Zerubbabel to determine, but it would be God's choosing. This symbolizes the understanding of God's timing, the finality of his decision, and the potential of the universality of his decision. This marks the greatest temptation that he would face. After employing the aid of the Great I Am, he refused all other temptings by the Master of the Palace. This also symbolizes the egoistic temptation of Christ in the desert where he could call from Heaven the help needed to save Him.

These temptations are to teach us to be men of honor and integrity, selling ourselves for no sum whatsoever. Even the favorite disciple of Jesus denied his Master three times, exactly as prophesied. King Cyrus, knowing Zerubbabel and his unwaivering fidelity, made these demands to teach his court a valuable lesson. So we should all be in our lives, as perfect ashlar for our own Temples. According to the Christian religion, when Jesus gave his life on the cross for our sins, the barrier between us and God was destroyed, thereby allowing us to communicate with God directly. Zerubbabel, being a son of Light, was spoken to by the Oracle and had no hesitation in knowing Who was speaking to him.

These symbols are to teach us to be unwaivering in our faith. We are to live our lives as pure and spotless as possible, for we never know when we are to stand before the Great White Throne and be judged. We are to not sell ourselves or our fellow Brethren for rank, wealth, reputation, privilege or affection, lest we be held to make full satisfaction. We are taught that Masonic obligations will not conflict with our duties to God, our families, our country, our neighbor, or ourselves, so the temptation of his and his family's freedom must have been that much more difficult to resist. When the strength and might of the Israelites was revealed and offered to him, he pleaded to his God for strength and wisdom and that strength was granted to him to resist this great temptation. He proved himself to be as steady as a rock, but not just any rock, but as the perfect ashlar. We are the stones that will be used to rebuild the Temple. One stone alone does not constitute the rebuilding, but many stones, perfectly hewn and perfectly placed, will be used in the new Temple.

Each piece of the Degree symbolizes many different things. Zerubbabel represents the Savior. The Master of the Palace represents the future tempting of Christ and even our own temptations. King Cyrus in a sense represents God, in allowing the temptations that Job encountered, to be allowed for Zerubbabel to endure. Gold represents our earthly riches. Freedom represents our desire to be serviceable to our fellow creatures. The Holy Vessels represents our freedom of religion and our love for the Divine. Each of these becomes more and more difficult to resist in this Great Work. The apron lecture that was bestowed upon us in Lodge is the most beautiful example of how we should strive to

live our lives. We must always look to the East for better prospects, so that when we are at the end of our toilsome journey, our work may be proclaimed good work, true work, square work, entitling us to Heavenly wages of a well spent life. While we are stewards here on Earth, though, we must live our lives as such as Zerubbabel did, with our integrity and honor as the forethought of our every action.

Many Degrees throughout the several Masonic Degrees follow this example of Zerubbabel and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple, such as Knight Masons Degree. Zerubbabel represents many other Masonic characters, such as Hiram Abiff, Adoniram, and even Jesus of the Christian religion. Masonry teaches many valuable lessons in many different forms and through many different characters, all having the same ethical characteristics.