

KING SOLOMON'S TEMPLE

Historical Fact or Fiction?

by Homer Zumwalt, 33rd

The building of King Solomon's Temple about the year 1000 B.C. has fascinated the Archaeologists and scholars of history for many years, and the subject has a special interest for all Masons. The interest, however, often is not followed by the Mason past the acceptance of the ritual, plus his knowledge of the Bible story. Many of the lessons of Freemasonry are based upon the building of King Solomon's Temple and have been handed down to us through Masonic legend as developed in early Masonic catechisms and charges.

In the earliest rituals, the legend of the Temple did not appear, but through the passage of centuries, it has gradually acquired an allegorical and spiritual significance to all Masons and is an integral part of our Speculative Freemasonry of today.

As we examine the "Old Charges" of the Craft for evidence of the origin of the tradition with respect to King Solomon's Temple, we find it is not mentioned in the oldest of our "Charges", the "Regius Manuscript of 1390". The tradition begins with the second known oldest manuscript called the "Cooke Manuscript of 1410". Most experts agree that the "Cooke Manuscript" could have been written from earlier texts transmitted orally and compiled in written form in 1410. In the "Cooke Manuscript", mention of the building of the Temple is quite short, but with each manuscript that followed it becomes more prominent until by the beginning of the sixteenth century (when the "Dowland Manuscript" was written about 1500), the tradition had become more elaborate and established. From that time until the present day, it has been a part of Speculative Freemasonry.

The question still asked by some Archaeologists and researchers to this day is, "did King Solomon's Temple really exist?" If it did exist, then why have the Archaeologists not found some trace of it? As they point out, in all the excavations that have been made in the area, not one have turned up any solid evidence of it having ever existed. Our only authority and source comes from the Holy Scriptures where the Biblical story of the Temple is found in the Books of I Kings, Chapter 3 to 12, II Chronicles, Chapter 1 to 10, and Ezekiel 40 to 43, of the Old Testament. These accounts give a full description of the building and the events leading up to the building of that magnificent structure and its destruction by Nebuchadnezzar in the years following the death of Solomon.

Regardless of a possible conflict between the Bible student and the archaeologist on this particular historical account, the story of the Temple has remained as a part of Masonic ritual and degree work for some six centuries. It provides a Biblical background for the

Craft Ritual and a foundation for the beautiful symbolism of the tools used in the Masonic Lectures.

It is not my purpose to attempt to prove or disprove the existence of the Temple, for whether it did or did not exist does not alter the fact that it is intriguing both in symbolism and in Craft history. The student who wishes to probe for differences and compare the Masonic ritual and the Biblical account can find a number of small differences between the two. Some of our historical writers believe that part of this is attributed to the earlier enthusiasts of the Craft seeking to improve ritual matters by the injection of common sense resulting only to bequeath tangled problems which have to be unravelled by those that follow.

Since every stone of Solomon's Temple has disappeared, our earliest account is in I Kings VII, 15 to 22. This account was written during the Exile some 400 years after the Temple was built and when the original Temple was in ruins. The other account in 11 Chronicles III, 15 to 17, which gives a parallel account, was not written until 200 years still later, which means that neither of the authors could have actually seen the Temple. The account of the building and the measurements had to be recorded from the stories and accounts passed down by word of mouth from generation to generation. The possibility of the story being fabricated is quite small, but if so, it would constitute one of the greatest hoaxes in history and carried through some six centuries. There are also two other points to remember. The Old Testament is a saga of the Hebrews and thus embraces a vast amount of incidental historical matter, social customs, and laws. From this, our early Masonic ritual writers have drawn freely. Secondly, we read and view the Old Testament in our native tongue and twentieth century thinking. But, if it were possible to show any of the biblical writers a copy of our English version, not one of them would be able to understand the part for which he was responsible. It is not only the translation of the words, but the meaning for which the author meant at the time of writing. As new archaeological discoveries are made, though small in themselves, we allow historians to come a bit closer to putting the puzzle together.

Although our Masonic ritual only deals with the Temple itself, it was only a small part of the total complex of the Palace and grounds of King Solomon's time. But being such an elaborate structure in wealth, the Temple was the work of art. Never before or since has a structure cost so much in treasure and labour. It is probably the most famous structure ever erected.

Since the Jews were not skilled workman, but tradesman, most of the labor (all but 30,000) came from other countries. In II Chronicles 2, verses 17 to 19, we read that Solomon numbered the strangers within the land at a "hundred fifty three thousand six hundred". Such a vast army of workers would need tens of thousands more to feed and administer it, and the food requirements for such an army would require approximately 4,500 tons of food per month, which was an amount greater than was possible to raise in all of Palestine at that time. So not only workers but food for them had to come from outside the country controlled by Solomon.

All of this colossal effort was to construct a building no larger than most churches of today, measuring approximately 105 feet long (including the porch) and 30 feet wide. The time consumed in construction was seven years or more. The enormous wealth used in the

construction of the Temple as written in I Chronicles is as follows: one hundred thousand talents of gold (a gold talent is 131 lbs. troy); one thousand talents of silver (a silver talent is 117 lbs., troy) from Solomon's treasurer. Also from the private purse of David was three thousand talents of gold, and seven thousand talents of refined silver. From the people came five thousand talents and ten-thousand drams of gold, and ten thousand talents of silver. The value of the metals alone added up to the most costly project in history, and this does not account for the brass and iron, precious stones, woods, fine linens, skins and fabrics. The lavish use of gold, and the amounts mentioned are almost staggering to the mind.

As we study the events of that era and the importance that the construction had on the trade roots of the other countries, it would be logical to assume that some mention of Solomon, the Temple, and the trade roots would be recorded in the histories of those countries. Yet the only record found is in the Old Testament.

Despite some of the questionable aspects of King Solomon's Temple, there have been numerous recent archaeological pointers bearing evidence to the existence and the activities of King Solomon as a great builder. One of these is the recent excavated city of Megiddo, which is considered to be one of the most remarkable finds ever made in Palestine and which has illuminated a period which archaeology attaches to the age of Solomon. In the reign of Solomon, Megiddo was made the capital of his fifth administrative district and he set forth an elaborate plan for the rebuilding of the city by his able architects. A recent excavation first discovered in 1928 and since uncovered, consists of stables for horses, and space for chariots and grooms, all made from limestone pillars arranged in stalls each with a hewn limestone trough.

Adjacent to these stalls were found foundations and parts of walls which were obviously sheds for chariots and barracks for grooms. In the center was an open parade-ground. In all, there was excavated, accommodations for 450 horses. Subsequent diggings have disclosed the fact that only the southern part of the stables were of the Solomonic origin and the northern part of the excavation added at a later date. Dr. John Gray, noted archaeologist and Hebrew history expert, comments that the stable accommodations at Megiddo indicates that the statement in 1 Kings 10:26 that Solomon had 1400 chariots is no exaggeration but an accurate report. For in addition to the discovery at Megiddo, ruins of stables from the same period have been discovered at Taanach (near Megiddo) and also at Eglon. Solomon, we are told in I Kings 10, built chariot cities in which to keep his twelve thousand chariot horses. Megiddo is one of the places mentioned.

Another large scale discovery by the Hebrew University expedition, led by Archaeologist Prof. Yadin, is what he believes to be a section of King Solomon's Palace and an old city wall at Megiddo. The wall is of Phoenician style; 6 feet 11 inches thick. This could be another link missing for ages. Other diggings at this city have revealed details of Solomonic construction and furnishes the best picture of Solomonic buildings thus far found. The whole town was apparently converted to governmental use and when rebuilt the various features of the construction bear witness to the help of Phoenician Architects engaged by Solomon from Hiram of Tyre. The masonry construction of the Phoenician influence was entirely different from anything found in the preceding strata.

Another indirect archaeological find in recent years is what is believed to be the Solomon

Copper mines discovered by Dr. Nelson Glueck, Professor of Biblical Archaeology, Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati, Ohio. These deposits of copper ore were found in the area south of the Dead Sea which at the time was controlled by Solomon. This discovery is of more importance to Masons than that of the Stables of Megiddo because of the direct connection with Solomon's Temple activities. The discovery would explain the source of raw materials for the "two brass pillars", the Brazen Sea, the Brass Altar, the "ten bases of brass", and all the vessels which Hiram made and presented to King Solomon for the House of The Lord (I Kings 7).

Also discovered by Dr. Glueck at the tip of the Gulf of Aqabah, the north-eastern arm of the Red Sea, is what he believes to be Ezion-geber of I Kings 9:26, which was the copper smelting refinery. The sight itself is in a curious location where the winds from the north blow constantly and force through a natural wind tunnel to act as an artificial compressor to force air to feed the furnaces. The structure uncovered was found to be as curious as the location. The walls were pierced with two rows of flues, inter-connected by a system of air channels to form the furnace for an elaborate large smelter or refinery. Pottery found on the sight dates back to the time of King Solomon. Some of the walls of the unearthed smelter have stood almost to their original height for nearly thirty centuries. It is believed by Dr. Glueck, that by the size of the smelter, thousands of labourers had to be employed in its use, which means they also had to be housed, fed, and protected at the site. Skilled technicians of all kinds had to be assembled and materials, food and clothing had to be hauled in and out of the area. If Dr. Glueck is correct, then Ezion-geber could be one of King Solomon's least known but greatest accomplishments in conjunction with the building of the Temple and its utensils.

Although the Temple of Solomon has not been excavated, other Kings Palaces of the period have been found. For example, the Palace of Sargon II, King of Assyria. There, 31 courts, 209 rooms, and a Temple have been uncovered showing the typical Solomonic style of stone-masonry. Also, the Temple of Hercules, and the 8th century B.C. Temple unearthed at Tainat in Syria. These discoveries are both before and after the reign of Solomon, but we note that the plan of each is similar to that of the Temple of Solomon, usually containing a porch with pillars, a main hall, and holy of holies.

In many cases, the archaeologist have found many additional resemblances in individual items of ornaments and construction.

The Phoenician method of building a wall of strength was to alternate three courses of hewn stone and a course of cedar beams. This construction is mentioned in I Kings 6:36 as the wall of the inner court of King Solomon's Temple. The same method has been uncovered at several other sites including the Temple courtyard at Ras Shamra in Syria. Also copied in some of the structures uncovered are the Phoenician carved decorations of palm-trees and open flowers and chains used for borders and panels. Dr. G. Ernest Wright, who has written several books on Biblical Archaeology concludes that the Temple of Solomon was a typical Phoenician temple though more elaborate. Solomon, being the wise man that he was, borrowed much from his culturally superior neighbors. We get the same story from the history of architecture. Solomon's Temple, though well planned, as described in Biblical history, was decorated like some of the north Syrian buildings that have been uncovered.

Without any direct benefit that might have been derived from archaeological discoveries made on the site itself, we can only piece our odds and ends together. For while excavations have been made in the Jerusalem area, comparatively little work has been done on the suspected site of the Temple. The famous Rock where Abraham was about to offer up his son Isaac and where David met and appeased the destroying angel is by tradition named the site where King Solomon's Temple once stood. It is now the site of the Mosque of Omar, or Dome of the Rock, and the Moslems are reluctant to having their holy places excavated and disturbed.

Thus we can perhaps view with some patience the finding of solid evidence of one of the basic stories in our ritual and live with the Biblical record and the archaeological discoveries such as the diggings at Megiddo, Ezion-geber, Tainat and Ras Shamra. We have reason to hope that, with the passage of time and the efforts of the archaeologists, the site of the Temple will be uncovered and erase all doubts about the accuracy of our present source of history and make the Bible stand out more and more brightly against the background of the Craft.

References: 1. Bible 2. King Solomon's Temple in the Masonic Tradition - by Alex Horn. 3. Archaeology of Palestine and the Bible - by W.F. Albright. 4. Biblical Archaeology - G. Ernest Wright. 5. Transactions of Quatuor Coronati Lodge - Vol. 80 and 82.

End of 'King Salomon's Temple' – by Homer Zumwalt