

WHY BUILD A TEMPLE?

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In pursuing the study of Masonic history, we trace its course, traditionally, to the reign of Solomon, King of Israel, and the work of building the temple to the Lord, which was begun and completed under the direction of King Solomon, aided by Hiram, King of Tyre, and by Hiram, the Master Builder.

Let us pursue the subject further, to the events which preceded the building of the Temple and which preceded the reign of Solomon, to the life of David, father of Solomon, and the pre-existing history of the Hebrew race.

Abraham, or Abram, was a man who believed in God and who followed the teachings and rules of God at a time when others were living contrary to those teachings. He found great favor in the sight of God, and the Lord promised Abraham that he would be the father of a great nation. He promised Abraham land and flocks and possessions, and charged Abraham to do as the Lord told him.

Some of Abraham's descendants were true to the Lord and some were not. The promises to Abraham were fulfilled but all was not happiness and peace, because some found favor in the sight of the Lord, and some found disfavor, because of their actions and mortal failings.

They had seasons of prosperity and seasons of failure; they had years of peace and years of war and oppression, but the descendants of Abraham multiplied upon the earth, and God continued his promises because the majority were true to His teachings.

During the fourteen generations from Abraham to David, they had endured many vicissitudes and hardships; famine and enslavement; but throughout, the belief in one God, the Creator, was handed down from generation to generation, until the time of David, the son of Jesse.

David found favor in the sight of God, and rose in strength, wisdom, and power until he became King of Israel.

Throughout David's life, he remained faithful to God, but there were various occasions when he succumbed to the temptations of mortal man and sinned against the Laws of God.

In strengthening the people of Israel, David was repeatedly at war with the people of surrounding tribes and nations, and until his later days, was a man of blood in fighting the many wars and battles to establish the people of Israel as a nation and to protect for them the land which became their home.

The history of the Hebrew race, as recorded in the Bible, give one of the earliest records of the history of the human race.

At the time of the recorded activities of the descendants of Abraham, the ancestors of most of the peoples of present day Europe, British Isles, and the Americas were living in a condition of barbarism and savagery, as nomadic hunters, fighting with each other and with other tribes. Where any evidence of religion existed, it consisted of worshipping many gods, the sun and the seasons.

The Egyptians had already developed many forms of culture, had developed some agrarian pursuits, had erected various material buildings, and were affluent in lands, herds, precious metals and stones.

They also were often nomadic, but were more settled than most other races. The Egyptians had developed religious rites, customs and beliefs, but did not believe in one universal God as did the Hebrews. They worshipped many different gods but mainly, Osiris, Isis, and Horus, as well as many others.

To these gods, the Egyptians had built temples of worship, but throughout the Hebrew history, although many had built altars to worship God, and to make sacrifice as was the custom, and at many places they had built a House of the Lord, yet these were temporary structures and built of the materials readily available. None had endeavored to build a magnificent temple for the worship of God, one that would stand out as an example of architectural beauty and that would be expected to be outlasting the lives of generations of the people.

King David aspired to be able to build a temple for the worship of God, and to commemorate his belief and trust in God.

After his kingdom was secure, David prepared to build this House of the Lord as a representation of the faith of the children of Israel and as a reminder to those who came after him, to continue in the way of the Lord.

In the 21st Chapter of the First Book of Chronicles, we read that David went to a place which he thought to be suitable, and purchased the threshing floor of Ornan of six hundred shekels of gold.

In the 24th Chapter of the Second Book of Samuel, we read that he bought the threshing floor and oxen for fifty shekels of silver.

This seeming inconsistency may be in a matter of recording by tradition, or a variation in the value of metals.

David issued orders for stone to be hewn in great numbers and carried there. He also ordered timbers of fir to be cut; for iron and other to be prepared.

David had also set aside great treasures of gold, silver, and precious stones to be used in completing and decorating the temple.

Although David desired to build the House of the Lord, he realized that it was not proper for him to do so, because he was a man of blood, a warrior of many battles, and on several occasions he had failed to live as the Lord would have him live; so he charged Solomon his son, whom he selected to

reign over Israel when he himself should die, to be the one to cause the House of the Lord to be built.

David had led his people through many troubled times and had reigned over Israel for forty years, during all of which he had kept his faith in God and desired to have a magnificent temple erected as a monument of his faith and for the children of Israel to continue to worship the God of their fathers.

We refer to Chapter 17, First Book of Chronicles:

“And it came to pass the same night, that the word of God came unto Nathan, saying: Go and tell David my servant thus sayeth the Lord, Thou shalt not build me a house to dwell in.”

And also verses 11 and 12: “And it shall come to pass when thy days be expired that thou must go to be with thy fathers, that I will raise up thy seed after thee, which shall be of thy sons, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build me a house, and I will establish his throne forever.”

First Chronicles, Chapter 22: “Then he called for Solomon his son, and charged him to build a house for the Lord God of Israel.”

And David said to Solomon, “My son, as for me, it was in my mind to build a house unto the name of the Lord my God; but the word of the Lord came to me saying, “Thou has shed blood abundantly and hast made great wars; thou shalt not build a house unto my name, because thou hast shed much blood upon the earth in my sight.

Behold a son shall be born to thee who shall be a man of rest; and I will give him rest from all his enemies round about; for his name shall be Solomon and I will give peace and quietness to Israel in his days, he shall build a house for My name.”

Verse 14: “David told Solomon: I have prepared for the house of the Lord a hundred thousand talents of gold; and a thousand talents of silver; and of brass and iron without weight, for it is in abundance; timber and stone also have I prepared and thou mayest add thereto.”

David gave Solomon the plans and designs for the temple, and specific instructions for its building and adornment.

After the death of David, Solomon was crowned King over Israel.

In the fourth year of Solomon’s reign, which was the 480 year after the children of Israel were come out of Egypt, he made preparations to build a magnificent temple for the worship of God.

Much of the wealth which would be necessary for its construction had been acquired by King David but King Solomon also increased these possessions during his reign; we also read where others contributed to the supply.

When Solomon thought that the time had come for this monumental work, he sent word to Hiram, King of Tyre, saying, “As thou hast dealt with David my father, so also wilt thou deal with me.”

King Hiram assured Solomon of his assistance, promising timbers of cedar and assistance of skilled workmen, and he said, "I will send thee a cunning man, qualified in all manner of building and decorating with beauty, etc...." referring to Hiram, the widow's son.

We read in the book of Chronicles of the building and completion of the temple; of the dedication of the temple by Solomon; and of the deposit of the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy Place.

In our Masonic Ritual, we imply that this temple was built by Masons and traditionally trace Masonry back to the time of the erection of the temple.

Historically, we cannot prove this nor do we believe such proof is necessary.

Written records of Masonry date back some five to six centuries; prior to that time, only a small proportion of men were skilled in writing or reading, most of historical events having been handed down by men from mouth to ear.

Perhaps this may have been the case with Masonry during those intervening centuries. We know that much of Masonry has been taught by symbols; much by transmission from man to man; that the principles of Masonry have often been presented symbolically.

Perhaps Masonry has been an organization since the building of the temple or for centuries before; perhaps the story of the building of the temple, as obtained from the Bible, was used symbolically without historical connection; perhaps it is left for each one to visualize the lessons obtained from this account.

Today, Masonry is attempting to make each man realize certain truths; to cause each one to live a better life; to exemplify the lessons of Masonry by demonstrating to those about them the benefits from such association; by better living, by kindness, by understanding their fellowmen.

Even as the Temple of Solomon was created by the combined efforts of the 153,303 who labored on its construction, so will the ultimate symbolic temple of brotherly love and understanding be the results of the labors of all good men upon the earth.

Even as the Temple of Solomon slowly rose by addition of stone upon stone, so will the temple of our character slowly grow by the stones with which we work, which are our daily thoughts and daily actions; each kind deed and thoughtful gesture becoming a perfect ashlar; each act of selfishness or unkindness being a rough and irregular stone which will not fit smoothly with the others; which would mar the symmetry of the building and create weakness in the wall rather than strength; which imperfect stones could not pass the test of the overseers and would be discarded by the master workman.

Even as it was denied to David to build the House of the Lord, although he had acquired the wealth and provided much of the material, he being deemed improper for such a project because of his many wars, it was left for a younger man to carry out the designs given to him by David, may we draw the analogy that the ultimate perfection of man is not for us but for those who will come after us; that we should labor and prepare the way by our own acts and thoughts; teaching by precept and example that each one and each generation to come may be building stones, those stones the perfect ashlar of truth and honesty; of kindness and helpfulness; of courage to persevere in the face of adversity; that as man continues on he may gradually mount to the heights leading to the ultimate in

perfection of character; that the ill-fitting stones be discarded along the highway of life, that the motto of man may be, "Excelsior;" a stimulus for continued improvement.

As King David desired to build a temporal building for the worship of God and place for the Ark of the Covenant, so should we desire to build an individual temple to the Glory of God, that being the temple of our character built by our individual acts, deeds, and thoughts; that each stone be square and perfect; discarding imperfect stone, that integrity, honesty, and helpfulness be the perfect ashlar to create a temple of character acceptable to the Grand Master of the Universe.