

Lecture 1 The Ceremony of the Royal Arch

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The Book of Constitutions states that Pure Antient Freemasonry shall consist of only three degrees, E.A., F.C., and M.M. 'including the Royal Arch', and no more. The Master Mason's Degree closes with the J.W. and S.W. advising the W.M. that although they have been in search of the genuine secrets of a M.M. they still have not yet found them.

Why the Royal Arch? A clue as to the nature of the secrets is given in the explanation of the final Working Tools when it is explained that the compasses are intended to remind us of the Creator's unerring and impartial justice who, having laid down for our instruction the limits of good and evil, will reward or punish as we have obeyed or disregarded his divine commands. But nowhere in the three degrees are we told where these commands are to be found. Clearly for the sake of a sense of completeness within Freemasonry - if we are told to search for some secrets and have not yet been able to find them - there must be something more that complements the Master Mason's Degree and has not been disclosed to us thus far.

As with all comparable Masonic degrees and orders, the R.A. ritual invites the candidate to participate in a simple morality play. This particular story is remarkable in the accuracy with which it is drawn from the writings of the Old Testament. The ceremony opens with the Candidate randomly searching amongst the ruins of a temple when, entering a hidden vault, he discovers a scroll. This reveals part of the first chapter of Genesis, in itself the first Book of the Old Testament. [1] A later chapter of Genesis lists the Ten Commandments handed down to Moses, his brother Aaron and 70 privileged Elders (making 72 in all) who represent the twelve tribes of Israel which escaped from the Exile in Egypt. [2] Genesis also discloses that the sign of authority over the Israelites given by God to Moses was to be a handheld staff. [3] In this first part of our Morality play the source of the sacred law and its Commandments have at last both been revealed. This would be significant for all Craft candidates in the C18 whether of the Jewish, Christian or Moslem faiths which each revere Genesis (and the next four Books - the Pentateuch) as part of their sacred writings.

In the second part of the ceremony three Sojourners - that is, travelling builders of which one will be the Candidate or Exalte - re-enact this discovery in a short story set in Jerusalem at the time of the building of the Second Temple. This rebuilding followed shortly after the Israelites' return there from their Second Exile to Babylon.

For interest, the reasons for this Second Exile are as follows. About 1000 BC Jehovah ordered David to create a house for Him on earth. [4] With the assistance of Hiram, King of Tyre, and Hiram the Widow's son, David through his son Solomon built this house as a temple for Jehovah at Jerusalem. Disastrously Solomon allowed himself rather than Jehovah to be worshipped as King of the Israelites and, to hedge their bets, so to speak, the Israelites also worshipped other gods in other temples. [5] After a succession of increasingly corrupt Israelite kings - through a period of nearly 400 years - Jehovah's patience with the duplicity of the Israelites was broken. The Covenant he made with the Jewish peoples was ended by allowing Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, to invade Israel in 587 B.C., destroy Jerusalem and its temple and disperse its peoples. [6] The Jewish soldiers fled to Egypt, the merchants escaped to Tyre but the religious and political leaders were all captured and sent into exile in Babylon. To maintain the land, only the leaderless peasant farmers were allowed to remain. [7]

As foretold by the Prophets, Jehovah - a loving and forgiving God - ultimately relented and entered into a second great Covenant with all who would worship Him and obey his commandments. [8] This new Covenant permitted the dispersed Israelites to return to Jerusalem but, significantly for us, it now embraced *all* who worshipped Him, both Jews and Gentiles. (*By selecting this particular story from the Old Testament our Antient Freemasons therefore ensured the message of our ritual became directly relevant to not only to the Hebrew but also to Christian and Moslem Freemasons alike.*)

After a period of some fifty years of Israelite exile, Babylon itself was captured in turn by the Persians. The policy of Cyrus, the Persian ruler, was to control not to conquer subject lands and so he encouraged the Jewish priests and leaders to return to re-establish Jerusalem and a temple for worship. [9] Cyrus also provided money to help rebuild both the city and its temple. The Israelites returned in 538 BC led by their exiled prince, Zerubbabel. He was accompanied by several prophets including Haggai and by many priests including Joshua, son of Joseddech.[10] Although Ezra the law maker and Nehemiah the administrator returned to Jerusalem from Babylon some 70 years after Zerubbabel, they are also featured in our morality play because it is from their Books in the Old Testament that the full story of the rebuilding of the Second Temple can be found. [11]

The returning priests however lacked practical building skills. As they would not allow local non-Israelite craftsmen to defile the holy buildings, work on the Temple quickly ceased. [12] With Haggai's constant urging, an appeal went out to Babylon for skilled men to make the 100 day journey to Jerusalem to assist with the rebuilding. This was answered by 520 BC after which the Temple was quickly completed. [13]

Our three Sojourners represent this latter group of dedicated builders, drawn from the remnants of Zerubbabel's own tribe of Joshua still in comfortable exile in Babylon. Our story commences shortly after their arrival in Jerusalem.

The Candidate or Exalte should take notice of not just one but three discoveries made by the Sojourners in the crypt. As well as the scroll, they also found an altar. (Perhaps improbably this shows on one side the initials of the three builders of the First Temple: as the two Hiram were not of the Jewish faith, the presence of their names would have defiled the altar.) On the upper, sacred, surface however another name is to be found. This is the name of the Supreme Being to whom the Temple was first dedicated and who had delivered the Ten Commandments to Moses. For Jew, Christian and Moslem alike this Supreme Being is recognised as Mankind's Creator. It is therefore a name that men should speak of only with total respect and reverence and never said lightly, loudly or profanely. In the ritual we demonstrate this by merely sharing the name in syllables, never saying it loudly or familiarly. Ezra and Nehemiah confirm the Sojourners' discoveries and advise Zerubbabel that the name referred to is 'Correct, Most Excellent'. This perhaps requires explanation.

The Jews in Babylon, including Zerubbabel and his colleagues and (later) Ezra and Nehemiah, had all continued their traditional pattern of worship throughout their Exile. When Ezra and Nehemiah examined the altar, they were therefore able to advise Zerubbabel that it had been dedicated to the 'correct' (or same) god that they had worshipped in Babylon and who had come to their aid. *As the name was identical to that revealed to Moses. [14], Jehovah was therefore omnipresent, not confined to Jerusalem.*

There is another and perhaps deeper significance for the Candidate. In Zerubbabel's concluding Address, he notes that the secrets of a M.M. were lost for a period of nearly 500 years

and were regained as described in the story. In addition to revealing the name of Jehovah, what is this other important Masonic secret that the Craft and Royal Arch ceremonies at last reveal to the Candidate? The gap of nearly 500 years is the clue. It refers to the period from 1000 BC to 520 BC (between the building of the First and Second Temples). Both before and after these dates, Man had sought to communicate with God directly. [15] In the 500 years in-between, during the period of the Israelitish Kings, public worship of Jehovah (as with the other local gods) was 'institutionalised', channelled through the High Priest and the Sanctum Sanctorum of Jehovah's Temple in Jerusalem.

In the years before and after the Reformation, religious worship had been strictly confined to the established church, through its rituals and services. The great secret offered by Freemasonry to the travelling masons and indeed to all God fearing men was the reminder that God was omnipresent. Worship by Man of his Supreme Being was therefore not confined, say, to a weekly service within the Temple or Grand Mosque in Jerusalem.... or within a Wiltshire country church. God could also be sought, each and every hour of each and every day, by Jew and Gentile alike - through the private temple of a man's own heart.

It is suggested that this moral is as valid for a Candidate to reflect on today as it was when our Masonic morality play was first composed those three or more hundred years ago.

References

	Book	Chapter	Verses
[1]	Genesis	1	1
[2]	Exodus	24	1 - 4
	Numbers	11	14- 17 and 24/25
[3]	Exodus	4	1 - 5 and 17
[4]	1 Chronicles	28	1 - 6
[5]	1 Kings	11	1 - 13
[6]	2 Chronicles	36	5 - 13 and [esp.] 14 - 16
	2 Kings	24	10 - 20
	2 Kings	25	1 - 11
[7]	Jeremiah	25	1 - 11
[8]	Jeremiah	24	1 - 7
[9]	2 Chronicles	36	23
	Ezra	1	1 - 4
[10]	Ezra	3	1 and 8 - 13
	Ezra	4	1 - 6
[11]	Ezra	3 - 6	All
[12]	Ezra	4	All
[13]	Ezra	6	12 - 16
[14]	Exodus	3	13 - 16
	Exodus	6	1 - 3
[15]	1 Chronicles	28	1 - 6