

A SYNOPSIS OF THE CONSTRUCTION OF KING SOLOMON'S TEMPLE

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INTRODUCTION

Although the scriptures have brought down to us an amazing story of the building of King Solomon's Temple, and there is given to us a wondrous exact description of its architectural and structural arrangements, yet the restoration of the Temple and its associated structures has been the subject of diverse and varied ideas and ideals. Lineal measurements, materials employed, ornamentations, and details of its appointments and furnishings have been graphically portrayed in the ancient writings of Israel; but the reconstruction of these into a building portraying all the beauty and glory of King Solomon's Temple is no easy task.

It is universally agreed, that King Solomon's Temple was the grandest, most costly and most wonderful structure ever erected and dedicated to the worship of the true God. It is indeed the outstanding Temple of all history, of legend and romance, superior in every respect to anything built before, or since, unbelievably great, magnificently grand, and a marvel to all who have made a study of architecture. Israel never tired in its praise; students of the bible and of comparative religions never cease in their admiration and amazement at its beauty and glory, even though it is difficult to imagine its appearance in reality.

King Solomon's Temple is of universal interest, not only among Jews and Christians, but to all people. Freemasonry has kept alive through the centuries many fascinating legends and romances, innumerable symbols and rituals, rites, and ceremonies associated with the building of the Temple and with its history. For these reasons a review of its construction, an effort to restore its original architectural beauty and glory and the presentation of pertinent facts relating to its history are all of entrancing interest to Masons everywhere.

When one considers and weighs the stupendous cost of Solomon's Temple, the enormousness of the materials used in its construction, the vast number of workmen employed, and the length of time required for its completion, it is quite evident that most of the efforts for its restoration in its original magnitude, magnificence, and superlative greatness have been wholly inadequate. Even the most elaborate and carefully written treaties on the Temple are

disappointing, and quite certainly, fall- far short of telling the whole story of its greatness.

In our review we shall first trace the original inception of the idea and ideal of this marvellous structure, the purpose of its originator, and the elaborate preparations made by him for its erection. Then we shall make a careful calculation of its cost and, so far as possible, enumerate and describe the materials used. Special attention will be given to the architecture of the Temple and its associate buildings, as well as to the general arrangements of its courts. This will include, of course, its various appointments or rooms, their furnishings and their uses. From these reviews, an effort will be made to present a composite mental portraiture, a picturesque representation of the Temple and its associate buildings.

A PERPETUATION OF THE TABERNACLE

In a very real sense, the Temple erected by King Solomon was the successor of the tabernacle built under the directions of Moses in the wilderness at Mount Sinai. The chief idea of the Hebrew terms for Temple was "a dwelling place for God," where He could be approached, not that, of a place of assembly. It was, therefore, patterned after the Tabernacle in all of its principle appointments, though built on a much larger, more elaborate and more expensive scale.

When the national institutions of Israel became firmly established under the reign of King David and Jerusalem was made the religious centre, the proposal for the erection of a Temple of superior grandeur and magnificence found expression in the heart of this noble and devoutly religious king.

He was commended of God for this desire, but forbidden to carry it into reality because "he had been a man of war." A period of national peace and prosperity was necessary for the construction of the type of building that would truly represent the greatness, majesty and glory of Jehovah, and that would serve as the permanent religious centre and symbol of the spiritual life of Israel.

God assured David that the Temple should be built by his son, Solomon, who was destined to be his successor on the throne of Israel and permitted David to make elaborate preparations for its construction and to gather large funds and assemble vast quantities of materials to be used in the building. (See II Samuel, Chapter 7: I Kings, 5: 3-8; 8; 17; I Chronicles Chapters 22 & 28).

PRECIOUS METALS ACCUMULATED FOR THE TEMPLE.

Because of the enormous booties taken in his successful wars and the heavy tribute collected from the subjugated peoples, David was

able to accumulate an unbelievable quantity of precious metals for the building of the Temple. He gathered 100,000 talents of gold, present day value about \$4 thousand, million and 1,000,000 talents of silver, present day value about \$2 thousand million. From his own personal wealth he contributed 3,000 talents of gold, present day value about \$100 million and 7,000 talents of refined silver, present day value about \$15 Million.

The princes of his realm contributed 5,000 talents of gold, and 10,000 drams of gold, present day value about \$200 million and 10,000 talents of silver, present day value \$20 million. The total value of these precious metals accumulated and stored by King David reaches the stupendous figure of nearly six thousand million dollars (I Chronicles 22; 14 - 29, 4 - 7).

To this vast sum must be added the value of the brass and iron without weight "for it is in abundance" (I Chronicles 22; 14.), precious stones, onyx stones, semi-precious stones, great stones, marble, woods, fine linens, fabrics, skins, and other materials. In estimating the cost of the temple there must be added to these figures the expenditures of Solomon for additional materials of quarried stones cedar timbers and other woods from Lebanon, and various un-itemised supplies, as well as the services of thousands of workmen over a period of seven and one half years.

Even though much of the precious metal placed at the disposal of Solomon by David was held in reserve for the "treasury of the house of Jehovah" after its completion, it is certain that a large proportion of it was used in the building of the Temple.

LABOURERS EMPLOYED IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE TEMPLE.

One of the most fortunate things for Solomon in the construction of the Temple was the alliance with Hiram, King of Tyre, formed by his father David, and perpetuated into Solomon's reign. As a result of this alliance', the finest timbers were obtained from Lebanon and skilled artisans from Phoenicia were employed.

To secure the timbers from Lebanon, 30,000 Israelites were employed and sent in detachments of 10,000 each month. (I Kings 5: 13, 14). 150,000 of the remnants of the Canaanites were impressed into service as hewers and carriers. "70,000 as bearers of burdens, and 80,000 as hewers" (I Kings. 5: 15; 9: 20; II Chronicles 2: 2, 17, 18). 550 chief overseers and 3,300 subordinate overseers were appointed for the work (I Kings 5: 16; 9; 25). Of these 250 were Israelites and 3,600 were Canaanites (II Chronicles 2: 18; 8, 10).

In addition to these overseers, the work was under the direction of the chief of the officers. Thus, the greatest efficiency and the most abundant results were assured. Besides these vast companies of workmen and overseers, there were scores of the best architects, metal workers, engravers, "cunning" workmen in blue, purple, and scarlet, weavers and decorators in brilliant colouring, refiners of gold, silver, iron and brass, and other skilled artisans. These were drawn, not only from the most skilled in Israel, but from many foreign countries such as Egypt, Phoenicia, and other neighbouring lands and from many more distant nations.

HIRAM ABIF - CHIEF ARCHITECT

The entire enterprise was under the superintendence and direction of HIRAM ABIF principal architect and engineer. He was of mixed race, being "a widow's son of the tribe of Naphtali," whose father was a man of Tyre. (I. Kings 7: 13, 14). Like his father, he was a notable artificer "skilled to work in gold and silver, in brass, in iron, in stone, and in timber; in purple, in blue, and in fine linen and in crimson; also to grave, any manner of graving, and to find out every device which shall be put to him."

Cunning - a man richly endowed by nature with wisdom and knowledge; Hiram Abif was, indeed pre-eminently fitted for the almost super-human task of supervising every phase of the construction of Solomon's Temple. Is it any wonder that Freemasonry for all these past centuries has magnified and glorified the name of "Hiram Abif", the widow's son, in legend, in ritual, in significant rites and mysteries.

Few details of the construction of the Temple are recorded, but the work appears to have been carried forward with little confusion or hindrance, and with perfect unity and harmony among all the vast numbers of workmen. The walls were massive, constructed of stone which was hewn and prepared in the quarries, each stone being perfectly fitted for its position according to detailed plans and specifications. The woodwork was all prepared in the forests according to similar well-defined specifications so that no sound of axe, hammer, or tool of iron was heard at the Temple. (I.King.6: 7).

Throughout the construction of the Temple, King Solomon appears to have been in frequent consultation with Hiram, King of Tyre, and with his chief architect, Hiram Abif. The King of Tyre gave Solomon cedar, algum and fir trees according to all his needs, also great stones of granite, costly stones of marble, and hewed stones shaped for pillars and other purposes. The two in co-operation caused periodic trips to be made to Ophir, for gold, algum trees and precious stones.

SITE CHOSEN FOR THE TEMPLE

Solomon's Temple was erected on the Eastern Hill in Jerusalem, called Mount Moriah, or Zion. It was most probably selected by David and designated by Solomon as the place where the Temple should stand.

The sacredness of this spot dates back to the days of Abraham. It was here that he offered his only son, Isaac, as a "burnt offering unto the Lord" and where he uttered those notable words of triumphant faith "Jehovah-jireh" meaning "The Lord will provide". Here God did provide an offering which became the substitute for Isaac, but the obedience of Abraham was accepted by God as though he did actually slay his only son. The name MORIAH was given to the place by Abraham, signifying "Jehovah sees." The saying "In the Mount of Jehovah, he will be seen" ever afterwards filled the heart of the Israelites with consolation and hope; that saying became symbolised and made a reality in the erection of the Temple on Mount Moriah.

After the experience of Abraham on this mount it came under the control of the Amorites. A branch of this Canaanite people, known as "Jebusites" later established a strong fortification in the vicinity of this mount - so strong that Joshua's forces and those coming after him were never able to dislodge them.

David, however, captured the fortress of the Jebusites and established his capital there, naming it Jerusalem. Later he purchased the site of Mount Moriah from Ornan, or Araunah, the Jebusite, and there built an altar for sacrifices in thanksgiving to God for the deliverance of his people from a great plague. It was, therefore, doubly fitting that this mount should be chosen as the place for the erection of the Temple. Prepared and landscaped by Solomon it became "Beautiful for the situation, the joy of the whole earth." The site is 14½ miles from the Jordan, 15 miles from the Dead Sea, and 41 miles from the Mediterranean. It is a very high elevation, and the Temple was visible from vast distances in every direction.

TIME REQUIRED FOR THE BUILDING OF THE TEMPLE

Solomon began the construction of the Temple in the fourth year of his reign, when he was about 24 years of age and completed it in seven years and six months, or when he was about 31 years old. (I Kings.6: 1, 38). The date of the beginning of the Temple was about 967 B.C. or, as some say, about 1012 B.C. It was completed about 960 B.C. or as some say, about 1005 B.C.

More than 165,000 men were employed during much of this time, including those employed in quarries and forests, those engaged in

the actual construction of the Temple and in preparing the extensive ornamentations and furnishings. Thus, the magnitude of the work of building the Temple and the superlative grandeur of the edifice and its associate buildings are clearly indicated by these significant items.

THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE TEMPLE

The Temple itself, consisting of the great Porch, the Holy Place, most Holy Place, and the Chambers erected against the North, South, and West walls of the Temple, was built after the pattern of the Tabernacle, except that the dimensions of the Temple were more than doubled.

The series of chambers surrounding the Temple proper, on three sides was a three-storey building with a combined height of 30 feet, whilst the walls of the Temple proper rose to a height of 40 ft. The upper section of these Temple walls was provided with windows for lighting and ventilation. The first storey of this building was 10 ft. in width; the second 12 ft. in width; and the third 14 ft. in width. This difference in the width of these three storeys was made possible by narrowing the Temple walls 2 ft at the top of each storey.

The beams for the ceilings and floors rested on the abutments formed by these drop-backs, preserving the sanctity of the sacred Temple. The small chambers in this building were used for Temple officers, and for storage (See I Kings Chap. 6 Verses 5, 6, 8 & 10).

THE KING'S CITADEL

It must be remembered that the Temple itself was the principal edifice of many other architectural features and associate buildings. It occupied the highest point or the summit of a series of terraces round about Mount Moriah which may be regarded as the Temple Unit. These terraces, their architectural features and buildings, and Temple proper, all constituted the Temple as a unit. It seems, therefore, wise for us to define these terraces and their architectural features and buildings before describing the interior arrangements and ornamentations of the Temple itself.

The Temple occupied the West side of the topmost terrace of Mount Moriah, with the Great Porch and entrance at the East end. In front of the Temple to the East was the Inner Court, rectangular in form and calculated to be 400 feet in length and 200 feet in width, surrounded by a cloistered colonnade of three rows of pillars supporting a notable entablature of cedar beams and expensive highly polished stones.

Entrance into this Inner Court was by the Great Gate in the Centre of the Eastern wall. Just in front of the Entrance stood the Great Altar of Burnt Offering.

This Altar was constructed after the pattern of the Altar of Burnt Offering of the Tabernacle, but was made of Brass. Its dimensions were much greater, being 40 ft. long, 40 ft. broad and 20 ft. high. In the South-East corner of the Inner Court stood the Molten Sea, one of the most remarkable creations of Solomon's artist Hiram Abif. It was a large circular tank made of bronze, 60 ft. in circumference, 20 ft. in diameter, and 10 ft high.

This great Molten Sea rested on the backs of twelve bronze bulls in groups of three, facing the four cardinal points. On the North and South sides of the Inner Court were the Lavers, ten in all, five on each side. Each of these Lavers was 8ft long, 8 ft. wide and 6 ft. deep. They were made of Brass, raised on bases, which rested on wheels. The Lavers, the base stand the wheels were highly ornamented and symbolically embellished with Lions, Oxen, Palm Trees and Cherubim.

The Lavers were used for washing the animals to be offered on the Great Altar, and in cleansing the Court after the sacrifices. (See I. Kings. 7: 27-39). It appears that the second terrace, considerably lower than the elevation on which the Temple and Inner Court stood, surrounded the Temple and Inner Court on the North, is thought to have been 800 ft long, and 400 ft wide. The Eastern half was embellished by three rows of hewed stones or pillars, forming a colonnade which supported an entablature of Cedar beams and costly stones. The entire area was enclosed by high walls.

On the North side was the private chamber of the King, made of brass. In the Western half of this enclosure, also on the North side, was the Court of the women, including a series of chambers surrounded by high walls. On the South side of the rectangle was the Court of the priests in which were a number of chambers for the use of those who were actively engaged in the services of the Temple. The entrance for this area was in the centre of the South wall.

The first, or lower, terrace appears to have been an oblong rectangle, extending from West to East and lying to the South of the Temple, the Inner Court, and the area of the second terrace. Its dimensions have been given as 1,600 ft. in length and 800 ft. in width.

This entire area was supported by a retaining wall rising from the base of Mount Moriah, varying in height from eighty to two hundred and forty feet; as required to produce a uniform level for the terrace and necessitated for support and defence. Within this

area were located the King's House, the House of the Forest of Lebanon, the Queen's Palace, the Porch of Pillars and other associate structures, such as houses for the porters and singers, and havens for worshippers. This entire Citadel of the King, including the Temple and its courts, was surrounded by a wall beginning at the base of Mount Moriah, and rising to varying heights as required to attain the desired level. Some parts of this wall are said to have reached a height of 280 ft. The entrance to this citadel was at the South-West corner.

THE INTERIOR OF THE TEMPLE

Like the Tabernacle, the interior of the Temple was divided into two compartments, or rooms. (1) The Holy place and (2) The Holy of Holies. The Holy place, sometimes referred to as the Greater House, was 40 cubits long, 20 cubits wide, and 20 cubits high. The most general interpretation of the "Cubit" used in giving the dimensions of the Temple, is two feet.

This would mean that the Holy Place was 80 ft long, 40 ft wide and 40 ft high. Its walls were lined with Cedar boards, overlaid with gold. Its ceilings were of fir tree, also overlaid with fine gold and settings of Palm trees and chains. The walls were carved with Palm trees, flowers, and cherubims. The floor was of fir or cypress wood, and appears also to have been overlaid with gold. The entire Holy Place was garnished with precious stones for beauty. (See I. Kings Chap. 6 Ver. 2, 7, 9, 20, 22 & 30. Also II Chronicles 3:7).

Within the Holy Place were the Censer and the Altar of Incense, made of Cedar instead of Acacia, as was the Altar in the Tabernacle; overlaid with gold. There were 10 golden candle sticks, instead of one - five on the right side, and five on the left, together with their lamps and snuffers. Instead of one table for Shew bread, there were ten - five on the right side and five on the left, made of pure gold. It is thought, however, that the Shew bread was displayed on only one table. Instead of a curtain, the entrance into the Holy Place at the East end was provided with a large double door, two leaves to each door. They were made of Olive wood, overlaid with fine gold, carved with Palm Trees, open flowers and Cherubims. (See Kings. 6: 4, 20, 22 & 33, 34. and 7: 48, 49. Also Chronicles 4:8 and Hebrews 9:3, 4.).

THE HOLY OF HOLIES

The most Holy place was a perfect cube, 20 Cubits in length, width and height, or 40 ft long, 40 ft wide and 40 ft high. All the walls were overlaid with fine gold. The only article of furniture for the most Holy Place was the Ark of the Covenant, containing the Books of the Law. It was placed under the wings of two colossal cherubim, made of Olive wood, and overlaid with gold. Each of

these Cherubim was 20 ft high and had wings 10 ft long. The outside tips of these wings touched the two walls of the room, whilst the inside tips touched each other in the centre of the room. The four wings of the Cherubim thus extended 40 ft, or the full width of the Holy of Holies, with the faces of the Cherubim turned towards the Sanctuary. (See I. Kings 6: 16, 20, 23 and II Chronicles 28:11, II Chron. 3:9).

The two doors leading into the Most Holy Place were made of Olive wood, overlaid with pure gold, and carved with Palm trees, open flowers, and Cherubim, each door having two leaves which folded. Over this entrance hung the veil of blue, purple, crimson of the finest fabric, and palm trees, open flowers and Cherubim patterned after that of the Tabernacle (See I. Kings 6: 22, 31, 32 and II Chronicles 3:14).

THE TREASURE ROOM

It was originally thought that this room occupied the space above the Holy Place, the idea being that the height of the latter was only ten Cubits, or 20 ft high. The more favourable position now seems to be that the Treasure room extended the full length of the Temple, over both the Holy Place, and the Holy of Holies, a length of 120 ft. It was 40 ft wide and 20 ft high. This room was the Royal Treasury, where Solomon deposited all things of value, and from which he took them as occasion required. It was the storage room for things of value dedicated to the Lord, and for the silver and gold vessels and instruments of the Temple. (I. Kings. 6:2).

THE GREAT PORCH

This was the name given to the vestibule at the entrance to the Temple. It was 20 Cubits long and 10 Cubits broad, or 40 ft in length and 20 ft in breadth. According to 2nd book Chronicles, Chapter 3, Verse 4, this was a monumental structure, built over the entrance to the Sanctuary 240 ft high, forming a gigantic Tower over the vestibule entrance to the Temple.

THE TWO PILLARS OF BRASS

There was placed in front of the Great Porch, or entrance into the Sanctuary, two huge shafts, or pillars of Bronze. Each of them was 35 Cubits or 70 ft high and 12 cubits or 24 ft in circumference. The chapter at the top of each pillar was five cubits, or 10 ft in length, making the complete height 80 ft. These two shafts were massive works of skill, highly ornamented by a network of Brass, overhung with wreaths of Bronze pomegranates; each row containing one hundred. Upon the pillars and the top of the chapters were great bowls, or vessels for oil, over which were hung festoon-like wreaths of pomegranates, interspersed at various points with lily

work. These pillars appear to have stood in relief, simply as works of art, and not for support. One stood on the right of the entrance and one on the left. (See I Kings 7: 15-22. and Chronicles 3:15, 4: 12, 13).

IN CONCLUSION

This magnificent Temple of Solomon continued as the centre of religious life of the Jews, for more than 400 years, or until its destruction by NEBUCANEZZAR'S Armies in 586 B.C. During periods of religious decline among the Israelites it was allowed to deteriorate and was sinfully neglected. But each such period was followed by great spiritual awakenings in which the Temple was repaired and re-consecrated with reverent hands and devout hearts.

On several occasions the Temple treasury was plundered by foreign invaders, and the vessels of gold were removed as spoils, and on more than one occasion, weak or irreligious kings took of the Temple treasury and of its precious vessels to pay tribute to foreign kings under whose subjugation Israel was brought by defeats in war. These were replenished however by generous gifts from the Jews during seasons of religious revival and fervour.

When NEBUCHADNEZZAR ordered the utter destruction of the Temple, he removed to Babylon all the precious metals, the golden vessels and every valuable article of furnishings.

Two other Temples were later constructed on the site of the famous Temple of Solomon - (1) ZERUBBABEL'S TEMPLE, built after the return of the Jewish exiles from Babylon; and (2) HEROD'S TEMPLE, built by Herod the Great, some 20 years before the birth of Christ. Yet neither of these temples compared in magnificent glory, or cost, to King Solomon's Temple. Herod's Temple was more elaborate but had added to it, many paganistic features. It was this Temple which was the Centre of the religious life of the Jews, during the time of Christ. It was destroyed in A.D. 70. The site is now occupied by a splendid MUHAMMEDAN Mosque built in A.D. 636.