

The Solomonic Theme in Freemasonry

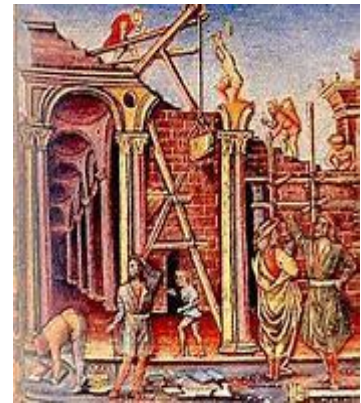
*Sir Knight Benjamin F. Hill, Knight Templar Cross of Honor
Grand Commander, Grand Commandery Knights Templar of Virginia 2020*

Building a man's character is a sacred task like building a temple and Freemasonry found a perfect model in King Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem and turned King Solomon into a Masonic dignitary and Speculative Freemasonry was on the way. But Masonry was not content with what Scripture said; it filled in the details by the copious use of pious imagination, going so far as to declare that Solomon was the Grand Master (one of three, the others being Hiram King of Tyre and Hiram Abif) at the time of the Temple's dedication. Our eighteenth century Masonic ancestors needed an exemplar which featured the art of building – enter Operative Masons and the Bible.

MEDIEVAL OPERATIVE FREEMASONS

The earliest known recorded use of the word "freemason" dates from 1376,¹ when it implied a highly skilled operative mason. These masons were responsible for many of England's Medieval castles, churches and cathedrals. Medieval Freemasons were craftsmen of superior knowledge and skill and belonged to a Guild or Masons Lodge. The Master Masters were sometimes referred to as Free Masons as "free" stone was the name of stone that was commonly used by masons because it was soft and allowed the masons to complete intricate carvings.

A Master Mason would have an Indentured Apprentice working for him and when the mason moved on to a new job, the Apprentice would move with him. When a mason felt that his apprentice had learned enough about the trade, he would be examined at a Mason's Lodge. If he passed this examination of his skill, he would be admitted to that lodge as a Master Mason and given a Mason's Mark that would be unique to him. Once given this mark, the new master mason would put it on any work that he did so that it could be identified as his work.



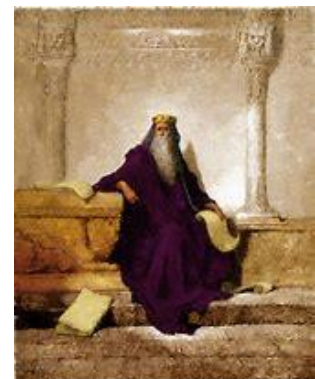
The medieval guilds operated during periods of intense religious fervor. It was an era of great pageantry, where church rituals were fully developed, and Passion Plays or Religious Drama dealt with the suffering, death, and Resurrection of Christ or other aspects of religious life. The primary purpose of

¹ *The Earliest Use of the Word "Freemason"*, Dr. Andrew Prescott, Grand Lode of Scotland, 2004

a Craft Guild was to establish a complete system of industrial control over all facets of the common callings.² Every art, science and trade were called a "mystery" and was treated accordingly. It was inevitable that freemasonry would enhance its long-established methods of symbolic instruction by incorporating more drama and ritual in its ceremonials, like those of its religious counterparts. Medieval Freemasons were men of superior knowledge and technical skills in the quarrying, shaping and setting of stones as well as geometry and structural design of the building and the multitude of associated trades such as the sculpture, stained glass windows and all decorative work. These master masons were men of ideas who developed methods of practical "hands on" teaching, an elaborate system of symbolism, and many rites and ceremonies.

These ritualistic dramas developed along three distinct lines: Book of Genesis; Temples at Jerusalem; and Religious Characters.³ The Genesis theme is concerned with Noah and the flood; Lamech and his four children; and Nimrod, the great-grandson of Noah and the first great builder mentioned in the Bible and the traditional founder of Operative Masonry. The traditional history of Operative Free Masons leads to the dramatic construction of King Solomon's temple at Jerusalem; its destruction by Nebuchadnezzar in 587 BC and the captivity of the Jews and their exile to Babylon; the release of the Jews from captivity in 538 BC under the Decree of Cyrus, the King of Persia who had captured Babylon; and the rebuilding of the Temple at Jerusalem under Zerubbabel. The moral presented in the Genesis theme is that divine judgment is inevitable, but that a reconciliation is available to those who repent and will enter a new covenant.

The degrees relating to the Genesis theme are usually called "Solomonic" and are represented in Symbolic Craft Masonry, Mark Masonry, Royal Arch Masonry, Cryptic Rite Masonry, Allied Masonic Degrees, and the Ancient and Accepted Rite. In addition to its historical content and symbolism relating to the working tools of Operative Masons, and construction of the Temple, it has been suggested a New Testament theme may have arisen to distinguish operative craftsmen from the Speculative Masons during the 1700s.



² *Freemasonry and the Guild System*, H. L. Haywood, *The Builder*, Vol. IX, No. 11, 1923

³ *The Earliest Known Masonic Rituals and Practices*, Andrew Fowle, Camp Hill Masonic Lodge, Brisbane, Queensland, 2013

The morals presented in the Old Testament teach fortitude, humility and universal equality. In the New Testament the same morals are represented in two of the Allied Masonic Degrees.⁴

St Lawrence the Martyr originated from an old Operative Masonic ceremony designed to distinguish true craftsmen from Speculative Masons. It commemorates the martyrdom of a Saint in Rome in the middle of the third century AD, when he displayed humility with extreme fortitude. St Lawrence was canonized for his fidelity and Cristian attributes.

The *Knights of Constantinople* refers to an event during the reign of Constantine the Great in the fourth century AD, when the Emperor curbed nobility pride and arrogance and rewarded his loyal artisans and laborers in Constantinople. The degree teaches a fine lesson in universal equality and humility and incorporates a suggestion of operative influence in an extensive lecture that also imbues the lesson of justice.

The Grade of Grand Architect is a continuation of the Solomonic legends of architecture, which seek to impose the ideal of an increasingly select and secretive body of craftsmen performing work upon the Solomonic Temple. It came from an Early Grand Rite of Scotland as the VII Degree of the Blue Series but is now only practiced in the American and French Grand Councils of the Allied Masonic Degrees.⁵

THE PERIOD OF TRANSITION

In the fifteenth century, Operative Masonry began to decline, chiefly owing to the Protestant Reformation in England.⁶ The replacement of Roman Catholicism by Protestantism exercised a considerable influence on masons' working conditions, by causing a great reduction in, if not the entire disappearance of, many holidays associated with saints' days and church festivals.⁷ Other influences operated to the same end: civil wars, import of foreign workers, and the revolution of thought.⁸ The number of non-operative Masons receiving membership in Craft Guilds, especially Freemasonry Guilds, increased as Gothic Cathedrals were no longer needed and Operative Masons

⁴ *Ritual of Allied Masonic Degrees*, Grand Council Allied Masonic Degrees, U. S. A., 1980

⁵ Grand Council Allied Masonic Degrees of the United States of America

⁶ *How Operative Masonry Changes to Speculative Masonry: The Period of Transition*, H. L. Haywood, The Builder, Vol. X, No. 2, 1924

⁷ *The Genesis of Freemasonry*, Chapter VI, Douglas Koop, Manchester University Press, Manchester, England, 1947

⁸ *How Operative Masonry Changes to Speculative Masonry: The Period of Transition*, H. L. Haywood, The Builder, Vol. X, No. 2, 1924

found themselves without employment.⁹ Seventeenth century Operative Masons were most favorable to the speculative element in their midst, and encouraged their admission to such an extent, that sometimes the lodges consisted almost exclusively of brethren in no way connected with building trade.¹⁰ The very secrecy associated with Mason Lodges may well have the motive for non-operative interest as well as pursuits in alchemy, astrology, Rosicrucianism, the Apocalypse, and the Bible.¹¹

During the Speculative Craft's early years, Kabbalah was in its European renaissance and Enlightenment was an intellectual and philosophical movement that dominated the "World of Ideas"¹² in eighteenth century Europe—it was the "Century of Philosophy"¹³. Modern Freemasonry under the influence of Masonic reformers James Anderson, John Desaguliers, Elias Ashmole, and John Montague the Second Duke of Montague. Albert Pike, a Masonic philosopher and reformer of the Ancient & Accepted Scottish Rite, and Albert Mackay, Masonic author and scholar, both influenced American Masonic thinking on the Ancient Mysteries, Symbolism, and Cabalistic Numerology. Brothers Walter Leslie Wilmshurst, Arthur Edward Waite, and Manly Palmer Hall were Masonic authors and lecturers who devoted their time and talents to the fields of philosophy, comparative religion and psychology and their influence on Freemasonry. These were among the early leaders that set the foundations of modern masonry.

Today's first two degrees follow the *Induction of Indentured Apprentices* and the *Making of Fellows of the Craft* ceremonies used among Masonic Operative Guilds and are the foundation of modern Speculative Freemasonry and Symbolic Craft Masonry. "The Three Degrees" are a development at the hands of speculative craftsmen of the Guild System which originally required a sample oath of admission for the Apprentice and a formal ceremony of admission for full membership, with possibly a secret rite associated with the membership. In the days of Grand Lodge (The Grand Lodge of Ancients and Grand Lodge of Moderns) has come to be a system of two degrees only, the Acceptance and the Masters' Part. In, or just before 1725, the Acceptance was divided up to form the Entered Apprentice and Fellow Craft Degrees, and by 1730 the Trigradal System was established. By the form of working which we practice today cannot be said to have come into existence until the ritual had

⁹ *Ibid*

¹⁰ *Freemasonry in the Early 1600s and 1700s*, W. J. Hughan, Grand Lodge of British Columbia and Yukon, 1904

¹¹ *The Genesis of Freemasonry*, Chapter VII, Douglas Koop, Manchester University Press, Manchester, England, 1947

¹² *A World of Ideas: Essential Readings for College Writers*, Lee A. Jacobus, St. Martin's Press, 1986

¹³ *A Century of Philosophy*, Hans-Georg Gadamer, The Continuum International Publishing Group, New York, 2006

been agreed on by the Lodge of Reconciliation.”¹⁴ An exposure in 1730 by Samuel Prichard, formerly from a Constituted Lodge in London England, reported that there were three degrees of Masonry being worked:¹⁵

Entr'd 'Apprentice's Degree (contains the major elements of today's First-Degree Obligation)

Fellow-Craft's Degree (contains references to the Temple, Pillars, Letter G)

The Master's Degree (contains much of the Hiram Legend)

Some Masonic authors have advanced the opinion that the Third Degree of Symbolic Craft Masonry was "manufactured" to fill an apparent gap, that of Master Mason. But Operative Masons were fully qualified and experienced Craftsmen, Masters of the Craft in the true sense, while the Master Mason was the manager or proprietor of a workforce operating as a Lodge within the Fraternity. In its present form the *Master Mason Degree* includes a significant part of the old operative ritual now referred to as the "five points of fellowship" and fortitude and fidelity of the principal architect. A review of Lionel Vibert's *The Development of the Trigradal System*, the two Operative Degrees were reworked by the Ancient and Modern Grand Lodges from 1717 to 1813 and later by the Lodge of Reconciliation until 1816 into today's three degrees.¹⁶

THE SOLOMONIC INFLUENCE

“Solomonic” is things relating to King Solomon of ancient Israel, but what significance is King Solomon and his Temple to Freemasonry? A legacy of the Operative Mason Guilds is the biblical dramas of King Solomon and the Building of the Temple at Jerusalem. A legacy of early Speculative Masonry is the *Regius Poem* of 1390, *Cooke Manuscript* of 1410, Anderson's *Book of Constitutions* of 1723, and Prichard's *Masonry Dissected* in 1730 – together, they tell of King Solomon and Building of the Temple at Jerusalem, Hiram Abif and the Hiram Legend. Solomon's Temple symbolizes the perfected Temple of the human body, the perfected Temple of the soul, the Temple of living stones.

The accounts of the construction of Solomon's Temple at Jerusalem is perhaps one of the most interesting events to Freemasons on their journey to Masonic Light. It starts with the Hiram Legend in the Second Section of the *Master Mason Degree*, followed by Albert Mackey's Lectures of the *Destruction of Temple, Captivity of the Jews at Babylon*, and the *Return to Jerusalem* and subsequent rebuilding of the Temple in the Capitulary and Cryptic degrees. The “work oriented” degrees from the Operative Solomonic dramas also

¹⁴ *The Development of the Trigradal System*, Lionel Vibert, The Prestonian Lecture 1925

¹⁵ *Masonry Dissected*, Samuel Prichard, London, 1730

¹⁶ *The Development of the Trigradal System*, Lionel Vibert, The Prestonian Lecture 1925

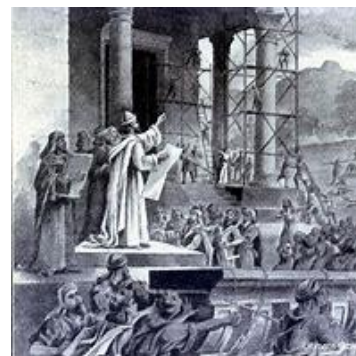
included both the preparation of the stones and their erection in the building of the Temple and there are some close similarities to Symbolic Craft ritual.

THE FIRST TEMPLE

Around 1002 BC, after consolidating his power, David became King of Judah and decided to build a permanent residence and shrine to the Lord. He said: "*I dwell in a house of cedar, but the Ark of God dwelleth with Curtains.*"¹⁷ But, because David's hands were stained by the blood of his enemies, he was precluded from building a Temple for the Lord,¹⁸ but could collect the materials, treasures, and land for the project. The site selected was on Mount Moriah on the east side of the "Old City" of Jerusalem.

The task fell to David's son, Solomon, who started to build the "First Temple" in 966 BC and finished it seven years later. The construction is well-reported in First Kings, Chapters 5 and 6 and is the scene at the Mark Master's Degree. The crowning achievement of King Solomon's reign was the erection of the Lord's House in the capital of ancient Israel – Jerusalem. Solomon entered a compact with Hiram I, King of Tyre, and spared no expense building the Temple. He ordered vast quantities of cedar wood from King Hiram of Tyre¹⁹, had huge blocks of the choicest quarried stone hewn for the building's foundation.²⁰ To complete the massive project, he imposed forced labor on all his subjects, drafting people to work shifts sometimes lasting months at a time.²¹ Some 3,300 officials were appointed to oversee the Temple's erection.²² Solomon assumed such heavy debts in building the Temple that he was forced to pay off King Hiram by handing over twenty towns in Galilee.

In the *Mark Master's Degree*, the candidate represents one of thousands of craftsmen preparing the stones for the Lord's House and is to present his work properly prepared in accordance with the working plans and correctly fitted, marked and numbered ready for erection at the site. The ritual is very dramatic and teaches that every diligent workman has a chance to distinguish himself by preparing some special and superior piece of work that will strengthen and adorn the structure if he carries out the work strictly in accordance with the Divine Plan.



¹⁷ 2 Samuel 7:2, NIV

¹⁸ 1 Chronicles 28:3, NIV

¹⁹ 1 Kings 5:8-10, NIV

²⁰ 1 Kings 5:17-18, NIV

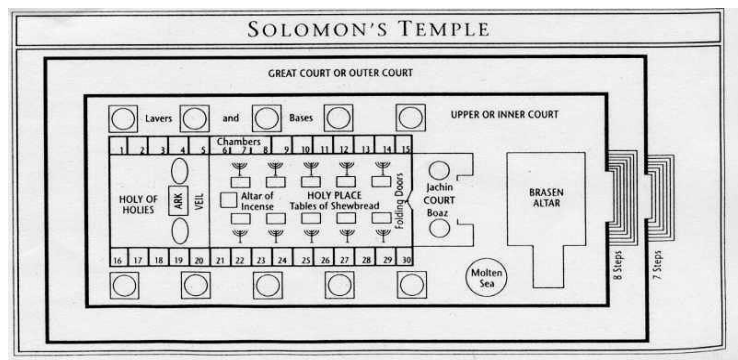
²¹ 1 Kings 5:13-14, NIV

²² 1 Kings 5:15, NIV

When the Temple site is prepared, twenty-seven experienced, trustworthy craftsmen are chosen, appointed as Select Masters, and delegated to construct the secret vault beneath the future location of the Holy of Holies. The candidate represents Zabud, a friend of King Solomon, who had important business to communicate and inadvertently gained admission to the vault. The unworthy guard whose laxity allowed Zabud to enter was condemned to death and Zabud was pardoned and obligated as a Select Master. The *Select Master's Degree* warns of the great danger of carelessness and teaches the need for constant care, uprightness and integrity in the fulfilment of one's allotted duties, coupled with justice and mercy. The Allied Masonic Degrees' *Grand Tilers of Solomon* closely resembles today's *Select Master's Degree*.

The secret vault being completed, King Solomon selected seven craftsmen based on their great skill in the arts and sciences, especially that of sculpture, to assist Grand Master Abif in finishing the Sanctum Sanctorum and deposit the Holy Vessels and an exact copy of the Book of the Law therein. The three Grand Masters agreed that should any of them die, the other two would deposit the Master's Word in the secret vault. In the *Royal Master's Degree*, the candidate represents Adoniram, "the first of the Fellow Crafts"²³ and Chief Overseer, who wished to know when he might receive the Master's Word. Grand Master Abif responded to Adoniram with an elegant discourse, during which he inadvertently reveals the place of preservation—"when I die bury it here"!

The temple was completed shortly after the death of the third Grand Master and the holy relics from the tabernacle were moved into the Holy Place of the Temple, the Ark of the Covenant was put in the Holy of Holies under the outspread wings of the cherubim, then the temple was consecrated in all its glory and beauty. King Solomon rewarded his most skillful workmen by creating them Most Excellent Masters, thus creating a new tie with his faithful craftsmen. The degree teaches that faithful service will be justly rewarded and that the tenets of Freemasonry should bind us together in one fraternal union.



Ryrie Study Bible

²³ *An Encyclopedia of Freemasonry*, Albert G. Mackey, The Masonic History Company, New York, 1924

The First Temple retained its original splendor for thirty-three years. Solomon eventually wandered from fellowship with the Lord, compromised with idolatry, and did not keep the Lord's covenants and statutes. God raised up an adversary against him, Hadad the Edomite.²⁴ The result was considerable turmoil in Judah and the King's Court and, after Solomon's death, the Kingdom of Judah began a spiritual decline.²⁵ After Solomon's death in 945 BC, Judah was ruled by twenty self-centered, personally-ambitious kings for the next 367 years starting with Solomon's son, Rehoboam. Ancient temples usually served as state treasures, to be filled with booty from conquests or emptied to pay tribute to overlords. Solomon's Temple was no exception and declined in wealth, splendor, and importance. Pharaoh Shishak I, King of Egypt, raided the Temple and royal palace of treasures during Rehoboam's fifth year. New treasures were collected for the Temple but, over the years, many of the kings of Judah desecrated the Temple and robbed it of its treasures, built idolatrous alters in the Temple Courts, and placed graven images in the Temple.²⁶

During the reign of Jehoiakim, the King of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar II, King of Babylon, plundered Jerusalem and its Temple. Judah lost its independence as a nation when Nebuchadnezzar appointed Jehoiakim's uncle Zedekiah King of Judah and his servant.²⁷ Zedekiah rebelled and Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Jerusalem resulting in the city's destruction in 586 BC; the city wall and the Temple including the Ark of the Covenant was destroyed. In the *Super Excellent Master's Degree*, Zedekiah fled the city, leaving his people to their fate; he was captured by the Chaldean Army on the plains of Jericho. Jehoiakim and his family were slaughtered, and Zedekiah's eyes were blinded, he was put in chains, and taken to Babylon. His court and prominent citizens, and a thousand skilled craftsmen were taken prisoner and deported to Babylon in 597 BC. Before their capture the loyal craftsmen, including Gedaliah who was appointed governor of Judah, pledged themselves to continue faithful to their trust, to be true to their obligations and to be honorable on all occasions. Judah became a Babylonian province.

THE SECOND TEMPLE

When Cyrus II, King of Persia, came to the throne in 559 BC, Persia was a client state of the Empire of the Medes. Around 553-550 BC, Cyrus revolted and conquered the Median capital and deposed the King of Medes. He quickly

²⁴ 1 Kings 11:14, NIV

²⁵ 1 Kings 12:26-28, NIV

²⁶ 2 Kings 21:3-9 and 2 Chronicles 33:2-9, NIV

²⁷ 2 Kings 24:1, NIV

extended his conquests, eventually defeating the Babylon Empire, and founding the Persian Empire.

The setting is 538 BC in the *Fifteenth Degree Knight of the Sword* or *Knight of the East* in Cyrus' palace at Babylon. The candidate represents Zerubbabel, whose name means "Exile", who was is a Jew born in Babylon, he was also known locally as Sheshbazzar, the Prince of Judah. Zerubbabel obtains an audience with King Cyrus and requests permission to return to Judea to rebuild the Temple, which is granted by a proclamation allowing the Jews to return to Jerusalem after seventy years of captivity in Babylon:²⁸

"The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah. Any of his people among you may go up to Jerusalem in Judah and build the temple of the LORD, the God of Israel, the God who is in Jerusalem, and may their God be with them. And in any locality where survivors may now be living, the people are to provide them with silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with freewill offerings for the temple of God in Jerusalem."

Cyrus sets Zerubbabel free and appoints him chief among his brethren, exacting a simple tribute as evidence of friendship and that Zerubbabel is still under the protection of the King of Persia. Cyrus issues his decree and creates Zerubbabel a Knight of the Sword, a mark of esteem and investing him with a sash and sword as the emblems of his office. This degree concludes with the hazardous return to Jerusalem, including the ancient drama of "crossing the bridge".



As Cyrus' Decree only applied to the descendants of the captives from the Kingdom of Judah, Zerubbabel decided to institute new degree, that of *Excellent Master* or *Passing the Veils*, so he could easily identify the craftsman authorized to work on the Temple. Before they left Babylon, the degree was conferred on the craftsmen, who pledged themselves to serve God, their brethren and their chosen leaders, and were encouraged to journey through life with humility, rendering to God the honor and praise that are most justly due to Him.

As the Jews returned to Jerusalem, they began rebuilding the temple under Joshua, the High Priest, and Zerubbabel, the Persian Governor. In the *Royal*

²⁸ Ezra 2-4, NIV

Arch Degree, three candidates representing exiles from Babylon, having received tokens as Excellent Masters and wishing to avail themselves of the Decree of Cyrus and assist in rebuilding the Temple, presented themselves to the Sanhedrin on their arrival. They were immediately set to clearing away the rubbish from the first Temple and upon detecting a hollow sound when digging at the site of the previous Holy of Holies, and upon further investigation, the craftsmen removed a keystone and discovered the secret vault. Access was gained through the opening and the items previously deposited were recovered safely. Thus, the “Word” was restored, and the *Royal Arch Mason Degree* was established. The candidates who made the discovery were exalted as Royal Arch Masons. They received several lectures on historical, philosophical and mystical aspects of the degree to impress upon them that Masonry is that great and universal science that teaches us our duty to God, to our neighbor, and a knowledge of ourselves.

Shortly after work had commenced, the Samaritans in the surrounding areas sought to join in the work but were told that they were not among those who had the right to build. Thereafter the Samaritans harassed the builders and enlisted the support of Tattenai, the Persian Governor of Samaria, the mountainous region bordering Israel. When Cyrus died in 530 BC, Artaxerxes ascended the throne as King of Persia and at the instigation of the Samaritans stopped the rebuilding of the temple. King Darius I ascended the Persian throne in September 522 BC and Tattenai and a senior Persian officer, Shethar-boznai, went to Jerusalem to learn whether the building was going on in accordance with a royal decree. At the request of the Sanhedrin, Zerubbabel went to Persia to make a personal plea to King Darius, which is the central theme of the *Fifteenth Degree Knight of the East or Sword*.

During his visit to Babylon, Zerubbabel was asked to participate in a debate in the Persian court on a classic riddle posed by King Darius – “Which is the strongest wine, the king or women?” Zerubbabel convinced Darius that women were the strongest of those three, but that truth was stronger than all things, which is the moral taught in this degree. King Darius accepted Zerubbabel’s requests and issued written confirmation of the Decree of Cyrus and gave instructions that the rebuilding was to be given every support and that no taxes should be levied. Tattenai and his colleagues thenceforth applied themselves with vigor to execute the royal commands.²⁹

Rebuilding of the temple was recommenced in 520 BC and completed in 516 BC, without any further problems from the Samaritans and almost twenty years after the first group of Jews left Babylon. Nevertheless, the Second Temple was completed and dedicated in the reign of Darius I, King of Persia.

²⁹ *Tale of the Guardsmen*, Non-Canonical Book 1 Esdras

IN CONCLUSION

The Solomonic Degrees are an Operative Story wherein ancient masons are engaged in the construction of an early and material temple. The work of the Operative Masons and their Solomonic dramas laid the foundation for today's esoteric theme in today's Masonic ritual, the vow to search for light and knowledge, and the allegorical discovery of the "Lost Word". The Solomonic dramas led the Operative Freemason transition to Speculative Freemasonry during the Grand Lodge period using operative tools – the Trestleboard, twenty-four-inch gauge, common gravel, plumb, square, level, and trowel – engaged in the construction of a spiritual temple, a house not made with hands.

Symbolic Masonry

The ***Entered Apprentice Degree*** starts with the Apprenticeship in the Temple. It conveys the principal tenants of Freemasonry and the ingredients for a well-ordered life – the foundation for lessons in moral and spiritual development.

The ***Fellowcraft Degree*** qualifies the candidate as a Craftsman of the Temple and introduces the five senses which are stressed in developing the mind through the application of the liberal arts and sciences.

And the ***Master Mason Degree*** introduces the Esoteric theme and the “Lost Word”. It reveals the sublime truths necessary for a well-grounded life and hope for eternal life. The Hiram Legend and use of the Trowel are introduced and the drama of Hiram Abif, a ritualistic drama, is used in the clash of forces, the crises and fates of the human spirit. The drama in the Second Section of the Master Mason Degree is focused on the death of Grand Master Hiram Abif and the “Lost Word”.

Capitulary and Cryptic Masonry

In the ***Mark Master Mason Degree***, the Master Mason prepares to build the Temple by emphasizing the skill and precision required of a Craftsman and accepting responsibility for personal work on the Temple and introduced the use of “Marks” in Operative Mason Guilds.

Then in the ***Select Master's Degree*** the Craftsmen are focused on constructing the Crypt or Secret Vault beneath the Sanctum Sanctorum or Holy of Holies of King Solomon's Temple. The construction of the vault and its approach tunnel is carried out by specially selected craftsmen and the

existence of the vault is known only to the three Grand Masters and those engaged in the work.

The Senior Overseer is concerned with disposition of the Word in the **Royal Master's Degree**. King Solomon's Temple is completed, the craftsmen are in the process of moving the sacred treasures into the Vault, and Grand Master Abif is slain, and the Word is deposited in the Vault; again, the ritual is one of great tragedy and loss for the Craft.

The **Most Excellent Master's Degree** is peculiarly an American degree and depicts the completion of the Temple and the setting of the Capstone, or Keystone, and the setting of the Ark within the Vault. King Solomon's Temple is dedicated – symbolically the **Most Excellent Master's Degree** represents building life and character and the reward which come to those who faithfully performs this task.

The **Super Excellent Master's Degree** is an honorary degree describing circumstances which occurred on the last day of the siege of Jerusalem by Nebuzaradan, the captain of the Chaldean army, who had been sent by Nebuchadnezzar to destroy the city of Jerusalem and King Solomon's Temple and the carrying away of the Jews in captivity to Babylon, as a just punishment of the Jewish King Zedekiah, for his perfidy and rebellion.

The **Royal Arch Mason Degree** is the Capstone, or Copestone, of the craft degrees and concerns itself with the discovery of the Crypt or Secret Vault beneath the Sanctum Sanctorum or Holy of Holies of King Solomon's Temple and the value of the resulting discoveries in bring additional Masonic Light to the discoverers. The Keystone, Mallet and Chisel, Jewish Half Shekel of Silver, the Arch, the Ark of the Covenant, and the Crown and Gavel of Authority reveal important Masonic truths. The Tau Cross, Triple Tau within a Triangle and in within a Circle, is introduced. The figures of Lion, Ox, Man, and Eagle as well. The colors blue, purple, red, and white are used to represent moral and spiritual values. Symbolically, the Royal Arch Degree reveals the requirement for a strong spiritual attachment to properly complete an everlasting spiritual building.

Allied Masonic Degree Masonry

The **Grand Architect** describes events leading to the completion of the third level of King Solomon's Temple. The candidate represents Moahon, an Architect, whose ideas of using spiral-shape columns led to his reward being obligated and created a Grand Architect.

St Lawrence the Martyr originated from an old Operative Mason ceremony and **Knights of Constantinople** which refers to an event during the reign

of Constantine the Great represents Genesis Solomonic themes in New Testament settings.

Scottish Rite Masonry

Knight of the East or Sword refers to the Babylon Captivity, Zerubbabel visits King Cyrus, the release of the Jews, their return to Jerusalem, and the attempt to build the Second Temple.

In the ***Knight of the East & West*** the rebuilding of Temple is complete. The degree figuratively represents the building the Third Temple in the heart of Man.

“It is the glory of God to conceal a thing (spiritual knowledge), and the glory of kings (the spiritually-minded) to search out a matter!”³⁰

So, Mote It Be!



³⁰ Proverb 25:2 NIV

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