

Short Talk #5

TEMPLES AND TABERNACLES

Think of the last time that you sat in your Blue Lodge or Chapter room and witnessed a degree or maybe worked with a new brother on his proficiency work. These activities have a common bond to each other, or should we say, two indivisible places that bind them into our Great System of Symbolism that we cherish in Freemasonry. Those two places are the Temple and the Tabernacle.

By studying the Old Testament in the Bible, our basis for Ancient Craft Masonry, we find the Temple and the Tabernacle, the physical manifestations for our purposes, or the settings for our lessons in morality.

Let us start by defining which Temple along with which Tabernacle we will be exploring. Let us consider the Tabernacle first because it is the foundation of the Temple. What is a Tabernacle? Who used it? What purpose did it serve? In the Old Testament, God's chosen people, the Israelites, were free from Egyptian slavery and their future and lives saved. Their leader Moses was instructed to build a place of worship to the One True God. These Israelites had just left Egypt where they had built the Egyptians temples to worship Isis or Ra, not their God. Now, God was commissioning them to build a Tabernacle.

The Tabernacle was a large tent-like structure that translates to mean "The Tent of Meeting". But meeting with whom? The Tabernacle was a place where God's spirit was manifest or lived, and the place where the Israelites would meet their Creator.

The state of the tribes of Jacob at that point in history was one of wandering in the desert, or being nomadic and constantly moving from one place to another. God knew their needs, so He designed for them a mobile place of worship, the Tabernacle. He adorned it with specially colored lines and vessels along with furniture of great wealth, a place fit for His presence. The Tabernacle represents the first restoration of the Physical Presence and Assurance of God to his people since He was with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. This same type of restoration is a common theme in all the Capitular degrees of Freemasonry, namely restoring the relationship of God with His people through worship.

The Tabernacle was divided by veils and restricted access to God by the mass of people and shows us a picture of offerings to His holiness. The Tabernacle was the place where the believer in the One True God received atonement for sins and mercy. So, why did Zerubbable employ the Tabernacle? Was not his ultimate goal to restore the worship of the One True God? Although rebuilding Solomon's Temple was his final goal, the spiritual preparation of the returning Israelites was not to be delayed in Zerubbabel's wisdom and obedience to God.

Temple worship was started by King David, Solomon's Father. David being a warrior was not fit in God's eyes to build a Holy Temple, but was given the commission and plans to build it. The actual construction was left to Solomon. In our Blue Lodges, we are taught about the framework and symbols related to the "most stupendous edifice". In our Mark Master degree, we learn of the strict specifications for building materials of the Temple. Remember how some stones were accepted and others rejected?

In the Most Excellent Master degree, the day of Solomon's goal, a completed temple is celebrated with awe and wonderment. Reflect upon the significance of God's spirit taking up residence in a Nation, imaging the feeling among the people. In the Royal Arch degree, we look back to this time when the zenith of the Jewish people, Solomon's Temple was destroyed. The tribes of Israel had repeatedly sinned against God and had been punished by being exiled into Babylon.

Zerubbabel is the champion of rebuilding the Temple. He gains the blessing of Darius, the Persian king to travel back to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. The Second Temple of Zerubbabel represents God's forgiveness and providence for the Jewish people, a way back home to their rightful place. Zerubbabel does complete the second temple and rules until his death. Later in Jewish history, the people and their leadership turn away again from God and are punished by being invaded by the Romans.

So, as Ancient Craft Masons, we should look to these two powerful buildings as symbols of God's Blessing and Providence. We should imitate the founders of our Masonic Arts by building in each of us a Temple, a permanent place in our hearts for God and a Tabernacle where we can meet and worship God.

"And since sin has destroyed within us the first Temple of purity and innocence may thy Heavenly Grace guide and assist us in rebuilding a second Temple of reformation and may the glory of this later house be greater than the former". Amen