

15th Degree – Knight of the East, Sword, or Eagle

Tyler Curtis

ōRise and Fallō

Freemasonry is obsessed with symbols. One of the most important symbols in our order is the symbol of the temple. Throughout the degrees of Freemasonry, we are taught about the history and building of King Solomon's Temple. We are instructed to regard with awe, and rightly so, the manner in which this temple was built, the materials that were used, and the way in which the work was organized. Truly, both sacred and Masonic history has a special place for King Solomon and his temple.

The facts and speculated history of the building of King Solomon's temple is indeed fascinating and important. However, the symbolism behind the temple is perhaps more meaningful and significant to our development as Freemasons. As King Solomon's operative masons were to construct a magnificent temple for worshipping the Most High God, we, as speculative masons, are to lead our lives in a manner that builds a solid moral and ethical temple. Our business is to glorify God by bettering ourselves through spiritual exercise. Our temple is not physical and temporal; rather, it is spiritual and eternal.

Sacred history informs us that King David was not allowed to build the temple because he was a man of war. God left the great task of building the most superb temple ever dedicated to Him to David's son, Solomon. Despite the splendor of the temple and its enormous extrinsic value, even it was doomed. Solomon, though a great and wise man, was human none-the-less. Solomon's vice seems to have been women. King Solomon had a thing for exotic women and he allowed his women to practice the religion of their choice. Obviously, this was not part of God's will, and for these errors Solomon was told that his temple would be destroyed. Following Solomon's death, God kept his word (I Kings: 9-11). Both David and Solomon, each of which rose in the Lord's favor during his life, fell victim to his faults. As a consequence, the greatest temple ever to rise and be built fell in disgrace due to a lack of obedience.

The story of the rise and fall of King Solomon's Temple, or the first temple, is played out in the Craft degrees and the degrees of the Lodge of Perfection. In the 15th degree, we begin the process of building the second temple. The most prominent figure in the building of the second temple is Zerubbabel. After the Israelites were freed from their Babylonian captivity, Zerubbabel was one of the principle people in charge of seeing that the temple was rebuilt. Again, this was a lengthy task and one that could have been more expedient had Zerubbabel and his fellows not surrendered to their desire to have lavish personal homes (Ezra 3, 4, and 5; Smith's Bible Dictionary).

The stories of David, Solomon, and Zerubbabel point out weighty moral lessons. These men were given tasks, but because of their ill deeds, the tasks were not completed as God intended. Humanity is given tasks from God, and we too fail to live up to God's expectations. Thus, our lives are a course of successes and failures, of rising one minute and falling the next. After one temple is destroyed, a renewed temple follows.

Our first temple may be represented by our birth and early childhood. We are born pure and spotless. A child is one with God's Kingdom. As tiny children, we cannot

think for ourselves and do not have an ego that leads us astray. However, as we grow and mature, we begin to learn and our psychological ego develops and separates us from God's voice. Our ego drowns out our soul's calling. Hence, our first temple is as doomed as King Solomon's temple. Like Solomon, without fail the children of God will slip away from the Father and falter. Our goal as God's children is to rediscover our spiritual temple after we have been separated from our Creator by our ego. Hence, our quest as Freemasons is to build our second temple, to subdue the ego and contact our soul.

Several factors contribute to the destruction of our first temple. These destructive causes are the antithesis of the virtues that Freemasonry has adopted. As Pike states, "Masonry is engaged in her crusade, ---against ignorance, intolerance, fanaticism, superstition, uncharitableness, and error" (237). These qualities constitute the opposite of Masonic virtues: wisdom, tolerance, prudence, logic, charity, and duty.

Many of our Masonic virtues are taught to us in the Entered Apprentice degree. First, humans forget to be temperant and find themselves indulging in the luxuries and vices of this world. Some of us indulge in food, or drink, or money. Others indulge themselves with beauty, with power, or with sex. Learning to balance our needs with our wants is a secret that contributes to the strength of our second temple.

Another ignored virtue that contributes to the destruction of our first temple is fortitude. For many reasons, we shy away from confrontation and become cowardly. Or, and at times with more disastrous outcomes, we are too rash and we jump into conflicts we need not be involved with. Again, leaning to be courageous while balancing rashness and cowardess is another pillar of our second temple.

The third virtue we are taught in the Craft degrees is prudence. Of course, we are not always prudent and reasonable. We think illogical thoughts and we display unreasonable actions. As prudence leads to wisdom, this virtue is another brick that fortifies our second temple.

The final virtue discussed in the Entered Apprentice degrees is justice. We are born just, but as we grow we become intolerant and discriminatory, holding stereotypes that lead to injustice. As the first degree lecture states, "as justice in a good measure constitutes the real good man, so shall it be the invariable practice of every Mason to never deviate from the minutest principles thereof." Justice is the cement that unites our second temple together to form an indestructible mass.

Another lost virtue that contributes to the destruction of our initial temple is brotherly love. Love, more than anything else, is the language of God. Loving one another and following the Golden Rule is essential to the construction of our second temple. Falling victim to hate serves to destroy our kingdom, but love renews and strengthens our second temple, leading us to eternal life.

Relief is another virtue that solidifies our second temple. Again, referring back to the first degree lecture, "to relieve the distressed is a duty incumbent upon all men, but more especially Masons." Helping others is the highest aim and purpose we can possibly have. By helping others, we build a temple of charity, and charity lives on in the hearts of those who we have helped long after being called the Celestial Lodge above. However, often our selfishness leads us astray, and our personal needs come ahead of the needs of others.

Finally, the virtue of truth serves to strengthen our second temple. Masonry is the enemy of ignorance and the friend of truth. The truth may be hard to accept, but it must be sought after and recognized. A temple of lies is bound to fall. From the ashes of these lies rises truth and understanding.

The Craft degrees as well as the degrees of the Lodge of Perfection are aimed at teaching us significant values and proscribed duties. We learn in these degrees what it is that we should be doing. The Chapter degrees seem to be reminding us of these principles and responsibilities, but in the Chapter degrees we are also taught that we are engaged in a process of change. This process of change is the building of the second temple. We have fallen away from our Creator. By following the values and teachings of the Masonic degrees, we bridge the gap between our physical and spiritual selves and become reunited with God.

Pike states that we are to work on, with the Sword in one hand, and the Trowel in the other! (239). In this passage, he is telling us that we must use our spiritual Sword to combat ignorance, intolerance, fanaticism, superstition, uncharitableness, and error; we must use the emblematical Trowel to spread the cement of brotherly love and affection, the mortar of our second temple. As humans, we fall and slip away from our Creator. But, like Pike says, "We must pass through the darkness, to reach the light" (240). Let the light of our second temple rise and shine bright!

Works Reviewed

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