

# CAPITULAR DEVELOPMENT COURSE

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## Holy Royal Arch Degree

### Brief History

The history of the Royal Arch has been outlined in the Background and History of the Capitular Degrees at the beginning of this course. However, it is important to consider a few points specific to the origin of the Royal Arch Degree itself.



Figure 67 - The Great Seal of the Grand Lodge of New York clearly shows its Antient origins, and depicts the Royal Arch banner and motto

The origins of the Royal Arch are hard to determine. There appear to be two major movements. The first suggests that it was imported from Ireland by the Irish Masons living in England – especially around London – and was part of the reason that the Antients seceded from the Moderns, since the latter appeared not to want to work it. This, it is claimed, is why the Antients worked the Degree while the Moderns did not, and why Laurence Dermott called it the “very root, heart and marrow of Freemasonry.” This does seem to run into trouble when we study the private correspondence of prominent Moderns, however, and we have already quoted James Heseltine, Grand Secretary of the Moderns from 1769 who wrote that “many of the Fraternity here belong to a Degree in Masonry...called the Royal Arch.” So the

Degree was by no means unknown to the Moderns, notwithstanding it was not ‘officially’ recognized until the Act of Union in 1813.

We mentioned briefly earlier, there is another view which suggests that, in fact, the Royal Arch not only existed prior to the Third Degree, but that the reason we do not see much mention of it

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until much later in historical terms is because there was no Royal Arch Degree originally – at least not called by that name – for it was the Installation Ritual of a Master. This becomes a problem, since if we cannot trace it by name, how are we to identify its origins? The answer is, we cannot. However, this does not prevent us from exercising our deductive skills in asking ourselves whether there are any hints of its existence prior to 1717.

Historically, the times leading up to the formation of the Premier Grand Lodge in 1717 were, to say the least, tumultuous! James I of England (VI of Scotland) had come to the throne in 1603, had given us the King James Bible, and was succeeded in 1625 by his son, Charles I. This unfortunate monarch was beheaded in 1649 following the battles with the Cromwellian forces in the civil war of England, and following this regicide, Cromwell ruled as king in all but name, imposing his dour Protestantism upon the English people until 1659.



Figure 68 - Satirical cartoon showing the Roundheads (Cromwellian forces) against the Cavaliers (forces of the Monarchy)

The restoration of the monarchy came in 1660, and Charles II ascended to the throne. Most of the English were sick and tired of the measures imposed by Cromwell and his supporters. Despite the present day view of the English as being self-controlled and uptight, the opposite was true in those days, and England was known for ribald behavior and merrymaking. Under Cromwell, churchgoing had been compulsory; horse racing and cockfights banned, as were drunkenness and blasphemy. Plays, brothels and gambling houses were banned, and many ale houses closed. It was not long before the public decided they hated armies and Puritanism even more (which is why they came to the United States!).



Figure 69 - Bonnie Prince Charlie, the Young Pretender

Life was fun under Charles II, but when James II came to the throne in 1685, his attempt to reintroduce the Roman Catholic faith and to rein in the excesses of his father's reign met with strong opposition, and led to his fleeing the country (and therefore assumed to have abdicated) in 1688, being replaced by his elder Protestant daughter, Mary II, and her husband William III from Orange, a region of Holland. Their short reigns were followed by the equally short reign of their daughter, Mary, and by 1714 they were already casting around to find another successor, since it was clear that Parliament would not consider any progeny of James II,

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especially since his son had attempted to invade England thought Scotland in 1708, and again in 1715, the year after George I ascended the throne. His grandson, Bonnie Prince Charlie, or the Young Pretender, also organized an invasion via Scotland in 1745, which was unsuccessful, since he was defeated at the battle of Culloden, and that ended the Jacobite claims to the English throne. George I continued to rule until his death in 1727, during which time he never spoke a word of English.

The point we should draw from all this British history is the incredible state of flux England found itself in during that short period of time. It had gone from an apparently stable monarchy in 1649 through a period of hardship under a Commonwealth run by a virtual dictator (Cromwell) for a period of 10 years. This was followed by a self-indulgent 25 years under Charles II, during which time a great plague affected London in 1665, followed by the Great Fire which razed most of the center of London in 1666. Sir Christopher Wren and others

were tasked with rebuilding the city in stone, and suddenly Masons from all over England were invited to come to London to help with the rebuilding, being offered Freedom of the City<sup>2</sup> by the Crown after seven years of labor. Now, many churches and major buildings had Lodges attached,

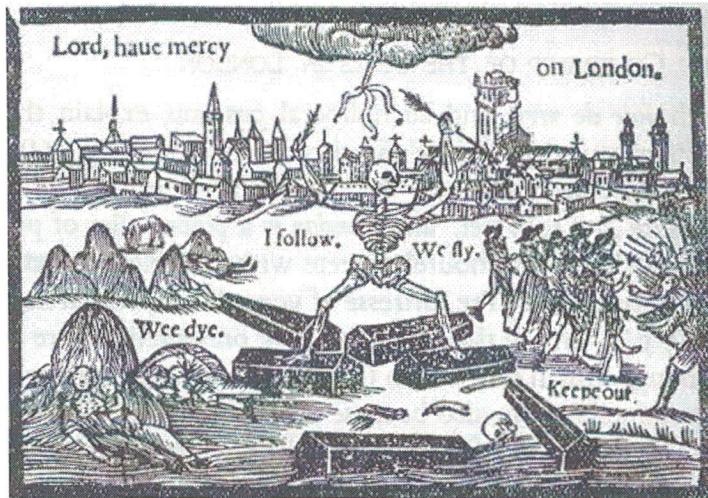


Figure 70 - The London Great Plague of 1665

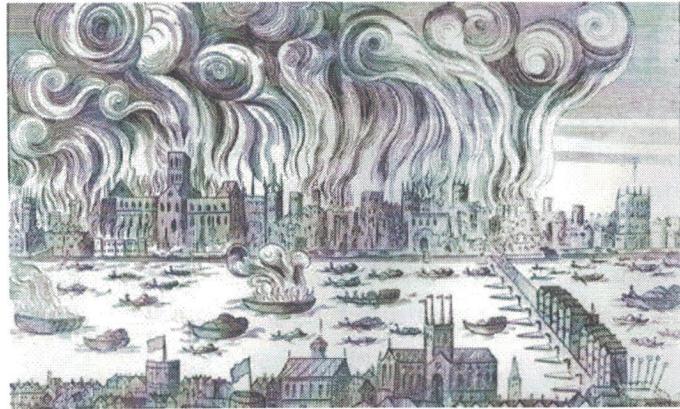


Figure 71 - The London Great Fire of 1666

either to maintain the buildings (one may see this tradition continued today at the cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City) or to rebuild them following the Great Fire of London. It is a fact that Sir Christopher Wren belonged to the Lodge attached to St. Paul's Churchyard. In 1689 the English saw their King depart from England and a new Protestant couple come from Holland to rule them. But at least Mary was of the bloodline of James II. By 1714 Anne was dead and now they took a

<sup>2</sup> *Freedom of the City* was an honor bestowed upon servants or serfs in olden times for services rendered to the Monarch, and later to Parliament or to the City Council, which entailed them being released from bondage and allowed to own property, to trade in their own name, and in some instances, the right to vote. Nowadays it is a largely ceremonial ritual, conferred upon visiting dignitaries or as recognition for long service.

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German prince (in fact Hanoverian, since what is now Germany was a collection of Electorates or local Princes at the time) to be their King. Within a year they were being attacked by Jacobite forces, which were repelled, and within two more years the Premier Grand Lodge was being established.



Figure 70 - King George I

To the average English native, it must have seemed like the end of the world. For most of them little of consequence had happened on English soil since the Wars of the Roses some two hundred years earlier, and most famous battles had been fought overseas in mainland Europe. But now their land had seen tyrants rule, kings beheaded, plagues, conflagrations, exiles, monarchs seemingly invading from Holland and Germany, all in the space of a few years. Each change in government brought new foes, and those who were one's friends, employers or work colleagues could be the 'enemy' the following year.

The atmosphere at that time was perhaps not unlike the McCarthy period in America, where everyone in this case was looking at their neighbor, wondering if they were secretly

harboring sympathies for the exiled Jacobite Royal family! No wonder the new Grand Lodge felt it necessary both to show clear loyalty for the King (while their antecedents were most likely to have been supporters of the house of Stuart), and divest themselves of any indication that they might have had prior connections to earlier royal dynasties. For one thing, it was important that their history began then, in 1717, after the attempted revolutions.

*Imagine being born into a wealthy family in London, say in 1640, under an apparently stable monarchy. You saw your monarch executed when you were 9 years old, and lived the next 10 years of your life in fear of persecution as being a Cavalier (we all remember the famous painting 'And when did you last see your father' by William Frederick Yeames, portraying the young boy standing before his Roundhead inquisitors). At 19 the monarchy is restored and life seems to be good! Any yet within five years your very life is being threatened with a deadly plague, and a year later to you see your beloved city burn to the ground. Fortunately, being of wealthy stock you spent most of 1665 on the country estate, and in 1666 you have returned to a*

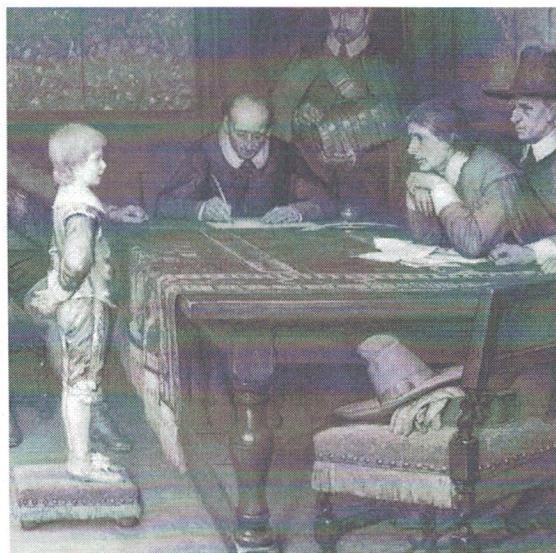


Figure 71- Detail of Yeames' painting "And when did you last see your father?"

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stone mansion on the outskirts of London City. During this period you enjoy the blessing of nearly twenty peaceful and entertaining years, and then, when you turn 49 the King departs and you see a succession of three foreign monarchs within the space of a few years, and throughout this time you are under suspicion of being a possible Jacobite sympathizer. You have to watch everything you say and do, the company you keep, where you travel, how you live. There are spies everywhere. And every time the Pretenders attempt to invade England the hysteria breaks out again. Finally in 1715, when you turn the great old age of 65, you find yourself one final time having to prove your

loyalty. You had been a Freemason for many years, and it mattered not that you spoke not at all about politics in Lodge: despite the wonderful times you spent, and the deep philosophical discussions you enjoyed, you were aware that your friends in Lodge comprised both Protestants and Catholics, and this was a factor which drove the need to tile the meetings and keep your conversations secret. Finally, in your winter years, you see the Craft you so enjoyed as a haven from all the nonsense going on around you during your life

transformed into a shadow of its earlier self, a body determined to seek patronage from the incumbent royal family, and prove its loyalty to a little known minor German prince. Part of this process include pretending you didn't exist prior to this time; and...by abandoning some of the most beautiful teachings of Freemasonry.

Of course this image is fictitious; but it is intended to show some of the currents behind why the new Grand Lodge might have decided to invent a new ritual – the Third Degree – which records indicate strongly was not created until the mid-1720s; and deemphasize some of the colorful ritual associated with earlier times.

A close study of the Third Degree clearly shows that it is incomplete. It ends with the conferral of a substitute word and substitute actions, and given that the whole of Freemasonry emphasizes the importance of the numbers three, and the fact that this number features so heavily in its symbolism, it makes almost no sense that the crowning moment of the Master Mason Degree should involve two men grappling as if seeking to find comfort in one another while they whisper a seemingly meaningless word into each other's ear. Once we arrive at the Royal Arch Degree we see the importance of the number three restored, as well as a the word; and instead of groping almost blindly at one another, three men now come together in an elegant manner to exchange what is no longer a meaningless word, but perhaps the most important word in Western history. The first thought that many new Masons have when they have completed the Third Degree is: when do I get the *real* word?



Figure 72 - Early London Table Lodge

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There are two main hypotheses concerning the Royal Arch Degree. Either it was the completion of the earlier Master Mason Degree; or it was an Installed Master Degree, which a Fellowcraft elected to govern a Lodge received in order to qualify him for the position, when there was only one Master Mason – the Mason who rules his Lodge.

Now, the main objections point to the fact that it is well-known the Third Degree did not come into existence until the mid-1720s. Surely, then, if the Third Degree didn't exist prior to that time, the Royal Arch could not have existed either? However, an alternative explanation could be that what the Grand Lodge was attempting to do was to replace the *existing* Third Degree.

Now, the completely fictitious story of Hiram's death was introduced (nowhere is it mentioned in the Bible) and a new word and signs substituted to create a completely new Degree. To do this the old Degree, which contained a straightforward story of the Temple's completion and the conferral of the True Master's Word had to be dropped. This new Third Degree had to be presented as though it was 'new' and was not replacing anything which had come before. Consider the

important Questions which are currently asked at the opening of all Festive Boards in England, which indicate there were Three Grand Lodges, the first being the Holy Lodge at the foot of Mount Horeb, the Second or Sacred Lodge held on Mount Moriah by King Solomon, and the Third or Royal Lodge held in Jerusalem, and presided over by Zerubbabel (we shall see this in more detail later). There is every evidence from its separation from the rest of the ritual and from the fact that it is in form of a catechism – an early device – that it may be of great antiquity. If so, and if the Royal Arch

was based on the story of Zerubbabel, it would make sense for the 'new' Third Degree to be based upon the story of the Second Grand Lodge, which had been formed for the purpose of building King Solomon's Temple. By homing in on an earlier Biblical event perhaps the intention was to make the 'new' Degree appear older; just as the Antients who formed in opposition to the practices of the Premier Grand Lodge took that title to give the impression that they had been around longer (and perhaps, if the Royal Arch was the senior Degree, in principle they had)?

Further, Gerhard Schott's huge set of King Solomon's Temple, designed for Christian Hienrich Postel's opera in Hamburg about the destruction of the Temple, had been displayed in a number of European cities following the production. One of these was London, where it was on display for a number of years, where it no doubt caught the attention of Freemasons of the time. An engraving of the design also became the most common depiction of Solomon's Temple in Bibles printed in England for nearly 100 years, and also featured hanging on the wall in numerous



Figure 73 - Mount Horeb

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Masonic engravings of the mid- to late 1700s. With this double influence of a physical representation of the Temple exhibited in London, and the Royal Arch catechism, we have two possible sources of the ‘new’, or what a number of contemporaries called the ‘casual’ Master Mason Degree.

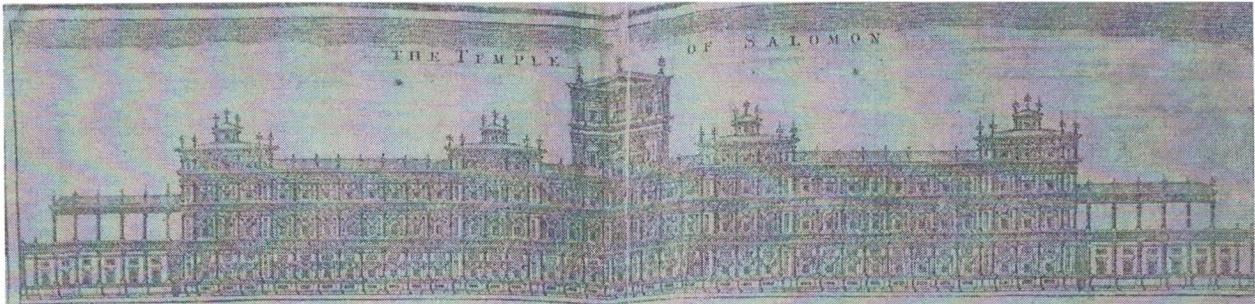


Figure 74 - Engraving of Solomon's Temple from a 1767 Baskett Bible

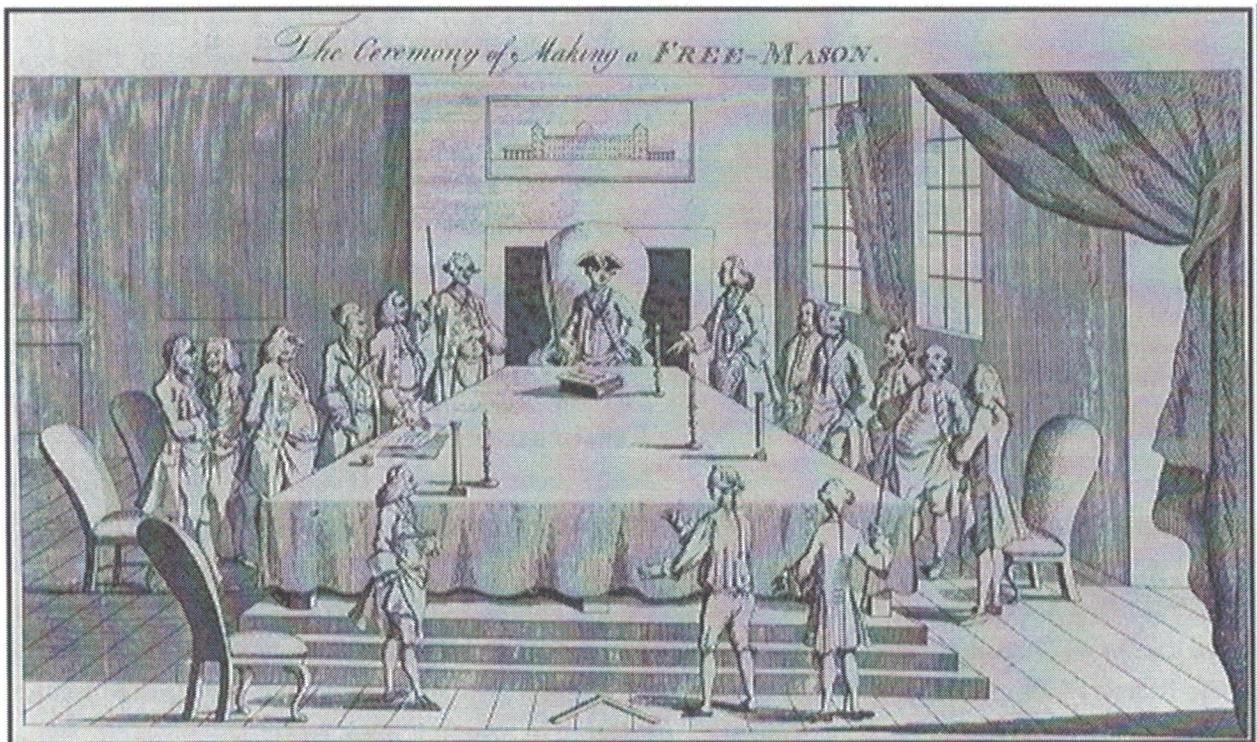


Figure 75 - Early engraving of a meeting in London - note the image on the wall is of Schott's Solomonic Temple

So we can conclude that there was possibly a movement around the time that the Grand Lodge was established in 1717 to create a Third Degree which was not associated with the previous roots, and indeed within a handful of years this new society was attracting both aristocracy and even members of the (new) Royal family. It is therefore no surprise that a number of contemporary Freemasons who lived in and around London, but whose roots were decidedly more pro-Stuart –

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especially those of Irish decent, who remembered their country's Masonry – should consider the adoption of a new Degree, at the expense of one they held dear, one of the major reasons they decided to secede and for their own, Antient, Grand Lodge.

### The Royal Arch in the United States

As we have seen, much of this was either unknown or a matter of indifference to American Freemasons. We have seen that the first global reference to a Royal Arch Meeting was in Fredericksburg, VA in December 1753. We also know that many Lodges were established by Antient Charters or by traveling military groups which established Lodges which would have practiced the Antient Degrees. To this we can add those who had traveled to Europe, to England, France, Spain, Germany, Ireland and Scotland, for pleasure or trade, and either joined Lodges there or visited Lodges having been initiated in the colonies; and who brought back their experiences of visiting those Lodges and Chapters. Finally, we know that a number of groups were practicing Royal Arch rituals prior to the establishment of the General Grand Chapter in 1797 and the codification of the rituals by Thomas Smith Webb. For example, there is evidence that Independent Royal Arch Lodge, No. 2, in New York City was practicing a form of Royal Arch Ritual early on; and Ancient Chapter No. 1, formerly Old Chapter, whose origin tradition fixes to be 1763, since its early records were lost through fire. ‘Old Chapter’ was old enough to refuse immediate admission to the Grand Chapter of New York when it formed in March 1798, and had issued its own Charters to Chapters in New York, New Jersey and Connecticut *prior* to that date. The new Grand Chapter held it in sufficiently high regard to keep the number ‘1’ open until such time as it decided to join eight years later, in 1806.

We are therefore fortunate that our roots are heavily in the Antient tradition, since the Royal Arch was largely lost and forgotten by the Moderns by then, while the tradition of preserving the True Word was very much alive in the former Grand Body and its missionaries, the military Lodges.

### Overview of the Degree

The Degree is quite long and complex. Before we examine each section in detail it might be useful to have a general overview of the Royal Arch Degree:

- A. The Candidates receive some instruction on the History of the Degree prior to entering the Chapter.
- B. The Candidates are prepared and enter the Lodge ‘under a Living Arch’.
- C. The Candidates pray, then rise and circumambulate, when they are challenged by the Captain of the Host.

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- D. The Candidates take their Obligation at the West Altar.
- E. The Candidate perform six more circumambulations, during which they see the burning bush, learn the password, and are taken to the first (closed) veil.
- F. The Candidates pass each of the veils, with the Principal Sojourner answering the challenges on their behalf.
- G. On gaining access to the High Council the Candidates, now Sojourners as they wish to sojourn with their fellow Israelites, are armed with a crow, pickaxe and spade, and sent to clear the rubbish.
- H. They make three important discoveries: a keystone, three squares, and the Ark of the Covenant. These are discovered buried in a vault, and brought to the light of day.
- I. The Sojourners bring their discoveries to the High Council.
- J. Inside the Ark the High Council find the Book of the Law, Pot of Manna and Aaron's Rod, as well as a scroll.
- K. Reading the scroll and deciphering the strange writing in the Masonic Alphabet around the Ark, the High Council rediscovers the Lost Master's Word and the Great And Sacred Name.
- L. As a reward the secrets of the Degree are conferred upon the Sojourners and the method of forming the Living Arch demonstrated.
- M. Several Instructional Lectures on the Apron, the History, the Masonic Alphabet and the Banner are given.
- N. The Ceremony concludes with an Address and the Charge.

## Furniture and Dress

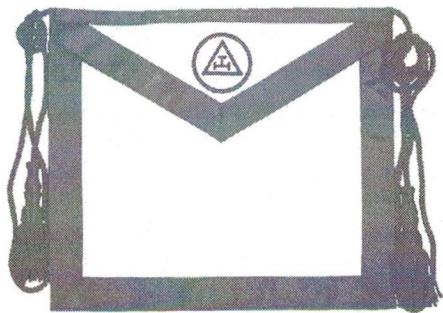


Figure 76 - York Rite Royal Arch Apron

Companions wear white aprons bordered with red, with a Triple Tau emblem in red upon the flap of the apron. We are told in the opening that the color red is the appropriate color of Royal Arch Masons, since it symbolizes “that fervency and zeal which should even actuate royal Arch Masons.” Incidentally, you will sometimes see Royal Arch Masons signing their letters with **WFZ**, meaning ‘with fervency and zeal’; just as many Blue Lodge Masons sign off with **S&F**, or ‘sincerely and fraternally’.

The Officers up to the Captain of the Host also wear swords, and whenever interacting with a senior Officer will draw their sword and salute that officer. The only exception is the Principal Sojourner, and this is more on account of the fact that he carries a staff, which reminds us of the staff carried by Moses.

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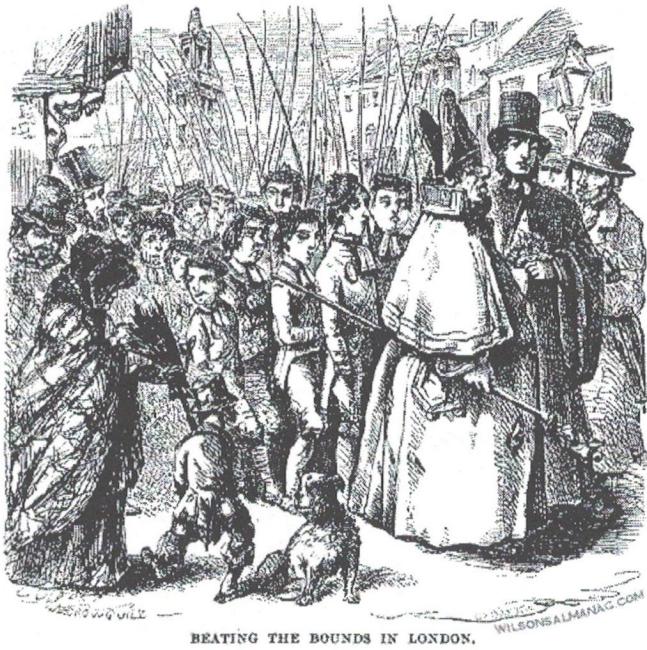


Figure 77 - Beating the Bounds, an ancient church ceremony where the bounds of the parish are indicated by willow sticks carried by the priest and church wardens, to teach the children – sometimes forcibly – the edges of their parish

There is a suggestion that the staff is also descended from early days in operative Lodges, where the rulers of the Lodge carried wands or staves to indicate their status. This practice may also be seen in churches, where the church wardens traditionally carry rods. Similarly, Black Rod and White Rod are officers in the Houses of Parliament in England; and Marshalls and other commissioned officers carry wands in the armed forces. It is believed that, as the line of Officers expanded within Lodges, and the lesser duties of the senior officers were delegated to the Deacons, they now carry the staves to indicate their delegated powers. Vestiges of these staves may also be seen in those carrying the four banners under the control of the Royal Arch Captain and three Masters of the Veils.

The Triangular Altar normally resides in the East of the Chapter Room, and bears the Holy Bible. Each of the four Degrees has a prescribed passage to which the Bible must be opened for each Degree; and the Square and Compasses are in their usual position when the Chapter is opened. The four passage used are:

- **Mark Master Degree** (blue ribbon) – **Matthew Chapter 20**: The first 15 verses tell the story of the man who hired laborers to work in his vineyard, the story read by the Right Worshipful Master during the Closing of the Degree.
- **Virtual Past Master Degree** (purple ribbon) – **Ecclesiastes Chapter 12**: This is the passage also used during the Obligation of a Master-elect in a regular Blue Lodge.
- **Most Excellent Master Degree** (red ribbon) – **2 Chronicles 6**: This is the passage describing King Solomon's dedication of the Temple at Jerusalem.
- **Holy Royal Arch Degree & Regular Communications** (white ribbon) – **Ezra Chapter 1**: This contains the Proclamation of King Cyrus and the list of the treasures taken from the First Temple which the Jews carried back with them.

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In addition to the banners of the Royal Arch Captain and the Masters of the Veils, each Chapter should have its own Chapter banner. The Royal Arch Banner or Standard is effectively that of the Antient Grand Lodge of England, establish in 1751. In its center it is composed of the banners of the four tribes Judah, Reuben, Ephraim and Dan, surmounted by the Ark of the Covenant, and flanked by two Cherubim. The Antients motto is often seen on them as well, which is Holiness To The Lord (originally in Hebrew on the Antient's banner). The Banner will normally also bear the name and number of the Chapter.

The other furnishings are covered in the appropriate passage in the following sections.

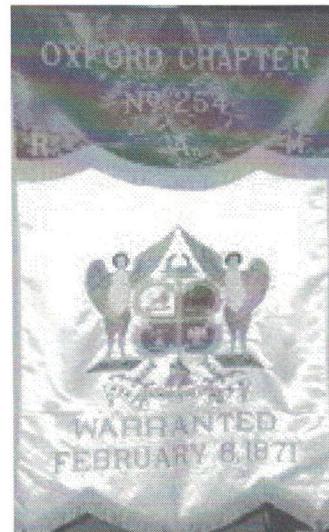


Figure 78 - Banner of Oxford Chapter In New York. Note the similarity with the Grand Lodge of New York Great Seal

## Opening & Closing

Regardless of which of the four Capitular Degrees is being worked, the Chapter will always open on the Holy Royal Arch Degree. If necessary, the Lodge will then be lowered to be appropriate Degree. When a Degree other than the Holy Royal Arch is being worked, care should be taken to remove those elements which are specific to that Degree (the four Banners, the Veils, the Ark, the Candelabra, etc.).

When a Chapter is about to open, there are nine essential Officers present. These are the High Priest, King, Scribe, the Captain of the Host, Principal Sojourner, Royal Arch Captain, and the Three Masters of the Veils.

In the East is the High Priest who presides, with the King to his right and Scribe to his left. These three compose the High Council. The Treasurer and Secretary occupy their usual stations. The Captain of the Host occupies the seat used by the Senior Deacon in Blue Lodge, and the Principal Sojourner that of the Marshall. Down the South side of the Chapter are four seats, occupied from East to West by the Royal Arch Captain, Master of the Third Veil, Master of the Second Veil, and Master of the First Veil. The Sentinel is outside, fulfilling the role of Tiler.

Behind the Royal Arch Captain is the white banner upon a stave. Behind the Master of the Third Veil is the Red banner; behind the Master of the Second Veil the purple banner; and behind the Master of the first Veil the blue banner. In the East is the triangular altar, bearing the Holy Bible.

The Chapter Opening largely follows the order of opening a Blue Lodge. After a purging of the Chapter, the Sentinel is informed the Chapter is about to open and guards the Outer Door. Since the junior officers are armed, the Royal Arch Captain is saluted by the Veils as he passes to interact

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with the Sentinel, and again on his return. The Captain of the Host is then challenged in a catechism with the High Priest, and proceeds to the rehearsal of the Officers' duties. These duties are a summary of those given at length during the Holy Royal Arch Degree. Again, each Officers steps forward and salutes with his sword when questioned.

At this point the Officers lead a procession of all the Companions around the Chapter, and end up forming a circle about the Triangular Altar, joining hands, right arm over left, to form a Chain of Fraternal Union. They are then joined by the High Council and a prayer offered. Following the prayer they bounce (the archaic word is 'balance') their arms three times and break the Chain.



Figure 79 - Triangular Altar

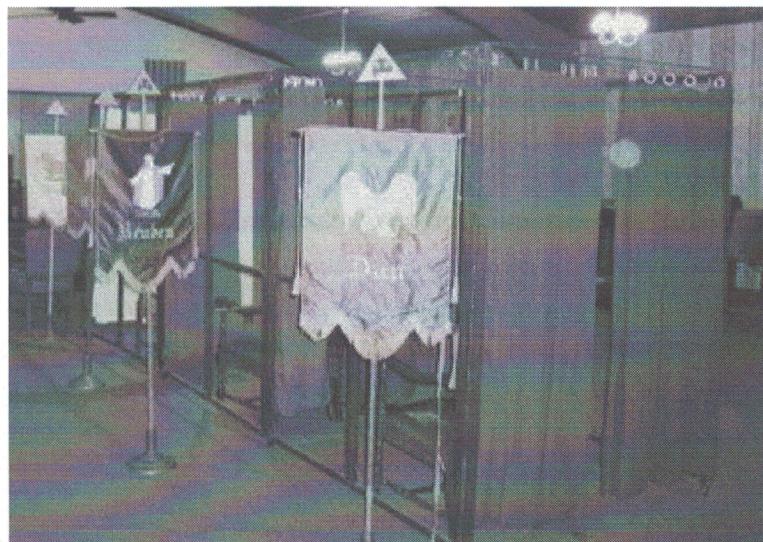


Figure 80 - Hillsboro Chapter, Illinois ([ram-il.org/chapters/chapters-furnishings](http://ram-il.org/chapters/chapters-furnishings))

realize the Royal Arch is not just a reference to the arch of masonry held in place by the keystone in the East. The Royal Arch is a living Arch, made up of living stones. The threes form a triangle with their feet, and two triangles with their left and right hands, again emphasizing the idea of 'three times three'. In this position they then repeat the High Priest's words. It is interesting to note that, traditionally, those forming the Royal Arches do not look directly at each other, but turn their heads to the left and look over their left shoulder. While it is not certain where this tradition comes from, it is most likely simply because oral hygiene wasn't very good two or three hundred years ago, and this was to spare the other two Companions from the stench of acute halitosis!

Note how the words used during the opening are almost like a mantra. Also, while the lines don't completely rhyme (except 'three' and 'agree') the meter is very poetic, and reminds us of early Degrees which used to communicate in rhyming verse, such as the Royal Order of Scotland. This suggests this formula, whose style does not really fit exactly with the rest of the Opening Ceremony, may be very old.

Now they form in groups of three to 'raise the Royal Arch'. Here we

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Once the word is exchanged in syllables three times, the Royal Arches are broken and the High Priest instructs the Captain of the Host to have the Bible opened and the Sentinel informed that the Chapter is open. He instructs the Principal Sojourner to open the bible and the Royal Arch Captain to inform the Sentinel. Note that it is appropriate of the Principal Sojourner to open the Bible, since in the Royal Arch Degree he is both the Candidates' guide, and also the expounder of biblical passages during their travels. Similarly, as the guardian of the fourth and final veil and therefore responsible for protecting the High Council, it is appropriate that the Royal Arch Captain also defends the Outer Door.

Once the Chapter is opened, the Captain of the Host and Royal Arch Captain process to the West of the Chapter, where the Captain of the host occupies the Senior Warden's chair and the Royal Arch Captain the Junior Deacon's Chair (this is why the Royal Arch Captain is the only Officer to interact directly with the Sentinel). If there is an alarm at the Outer Door, the Royal Arch Captain brings it to the attention of the Captain of the Host, who reports it to the High Priest. The High Priest's instruction are communicated to the Captain of the Host, who communicates them to the Royal Arch Captain. Note that, unlike Blue Lodge, there is no direct communication between the Presiding Officer and the Royal Arch Captain. This is similar to the point in the opening of Lodge when the Worshipful Master communicated his intention to open the Lodge to the Senior Warden, and he to the Junior Warden.

When the Chapter is to close the Captain of the Host and Royal Arch Captain process back to their opening positions, and the Chapter is closed following the short form closing ritual. This was not always the case. Indeed, the Closing ritual of Ancient Chapter No. 1 which uses an old form, is more like the Closing of a Blue Lodge in that almost the entire Opening ritual apart from the purging is repeated.

### Preparation of Candidates

The Candidates are clothed with white aprons as Master Masons, and also with sandals on both feet. They wear hoodwinks and a cabletow seven times round their waist.

They are Master Masons since they will now receive the true word and become Companions, which is the perfected state of a Mason. He is more than a Brother, which suggests a blood tie of obligation: he is now a Companion, a fellow traveler on the great journey of life, and his Obligations extend far further than mere family: now the entire human family has become his kin, and he labors for all mankind. There is a saying among those who follow the path of Transcendental Meditation (TM), that if only a small percentage of people, a number as little as 5%, practice TM, there would be no war, since the work of those few would affect all humanity. In a way we are being asked to practice our tenets, and by our adherence to our values amongst

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our fellow man we are given the ability to leverage a change which would vastly supersede our numbers.

As we will see, the removing of shoes and putting on sandals is integral to the Degree ceremonies, and the cable tow in this instance refers to an event rather more powerful in symbolism to its use in prior Degrees. We are told that the High Priest entered the presence of the Lord but once a year, when he uttered the Sacred Name of God in order to reestablish the link between heaven and earth. His garment was fringed with small bells, and a rope was tied around him the end leading out of the Holy of Holies, and held by the Kohenim or Levites. He uttered the Name while the priests and people made a great noise. However, this was a most dangerous operation, and if something went wrong – and the implication was that if the High Priest was in some way impure, or mispronounced the Name of God – his dead body could be pulled from the Holy of Holies by aid of the rope.

In Blue Lodge English Freemasonry there is a line which effectively states that if the Candidate had attempted to escape the Lodge he would have been accomplice to his own death by strangulation, and in a way the cabletow therefore is a reflection of this binding to obligation, and the serious consequences to a person who does not behave according to his vow.



Figure 81 - Moses commanded to take off his sandals before the Burning Bush

### Two Altars

In the Degree of Holy Royal Arch we find two altars: one in the East, and one in the West. The one in the East is the regular triangular Altar which normally doubles as the Altar of Incense.

However, in some instances – for example the Dedication or Rededication of a Chapter – the ritual calls for three altars: a Western one, the familiar Eastern triangular one, to which the Holy Bible is carried and deposited, and a third Altar of Incense, which is traditionally a white double cube approximately following the description in Exodus.

Why the Eastern Altar should be triangular (which is unique to the United States: in almost all other countries it is a double cubical white altar) is a matter for debate. The most likely explanation is more prosaic than symbolic. It was probable that, at some point, it was decided to have a three-

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sided altar to emphasize the number three, and to distinguish the paraphernalia used in the Holy Royal Arch from that used in a Lodge Room.

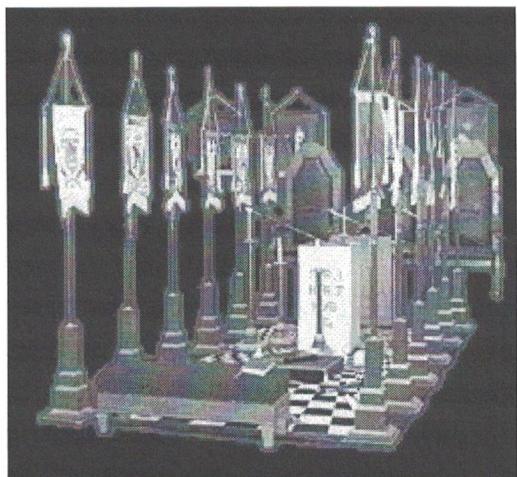


Figure 82 - In the English Domestic Ritual the Royal Arch Altar is a white double cube

The Obligation is taken facing West. Unusually it is not administered by the High Priest, but by the Captain of the Host, which in a Lodge analogy would be like being Obligated by the Marshall! Why is this? We must remember that Officers of a Lodge or Chapter often take on multiple roles, just as the Worshipful Master becomes King Solomon at certain points of Blue Masonry. In this instance the Western part of the room represents Babylon, and the Captain of the Host is King Cyrus, while the Council represent Jeshua, Zerubbabel and Haggai, the High Priest, King and Prophet or Scribe. Following the Obligation the Candidates will start to travel towards the light, or East in a Chapter Room, and towards Jerusalem.

Now the Temple of Solomon was laid out so that one entered the outer courts in the East and progressed West towards the Holy of Holies. While the key passages in II Chronicles and I Kings do not explicitly tell us the Temple's orientation, we find it mentioned in Ezekiel 8:16: "And he brought me into the inner court of the Lord's house, and, behold, at the door of the temple of the Lord, between the porch and the altar, were about five and twenty men, with their backs toward the temple of the Lord, and their faces toward the east; and they worshipped the sun toward the east." What this is saying is that those men in the Temple had their backs to the Holy Place, and were facing the East to worship the rising sun. In other words, they were committing idolatry. Therefore the entrance to the Holy Place must have been in the West.

This means the priests or Levites, who were the only ones permitted to enter to Holy Place, would return from the place which only they were permitted to enter, in order to instruct and educate the common people. This movement from the profane world in the East to the Holy Place in the West is exemplified in the story of the return from exile. Having been taken from their homeland to the foreign and alien city of Babylon, whose name means 'confused' in Hebrew, the exiles traveled West towards Jerusalem, which means 'foundation', or 'city of peace' in Hebrew. Symbolically, therefore, the people move from a lower plane (country) of profanity and confusion to a higher plane (country) of peace and contentment, and closeness to God. The symbolism of the Order of the Red Cross in the Templar Orders, for those who are considering continuing the York Rite journey, expresses this transition from one state to another even more forcibly.

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This does raise one odd point regarding our Lodges and Chapters. Although they are set up for us to move from West to East in search of light, more light, further light, in fact the original journey from the outer court of the Temple, or the allegorical journey from Babylon to Jerusalem, both involved traveling from West to East!

Why is this?

Well, this may well be a situation where certain symbolism *trumps* other symbolism.

We are almost hard-wired to know the sun rises in the East. Symbolically the link between physical light and symbolic Light has been made is just about every civilization on the face of the earth. This is a strong symbol. Similarly, the orientation of all synagogues, mosques and churches towards the East – meaning towards Jerusalem – has been the practice for many centuries. Remember that the ‘known world’ was West of the Middle East for most of this period; also, Moslem tradition states that for the first thirteen years of Islam, mosques or prayer meetings were oriented towards Jerusalem, before Mohammad received a message from God to re-orientate towards Mecca.

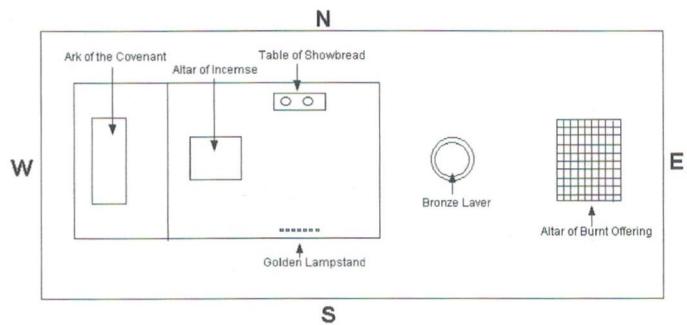


Figure 83 - Simplified Temple layout showing the entrance in the East and the Holy of Holies in the West ([www.christian-restoration.com/fmasonry/temple.htm](http://www.christian-restoration.com/fmasonry/temple.htm))

This brings us to one of the many bizarre accusations leveled against Freemasonry by people who have either too much time on their hands, see a conspiracy under every bed, or who are adept at misreading the Volume of the Sacred Law. It was mentioned above that Ezekiel criticized those who turned East to worship the sun. The point being made in the passage to any reasonable reader is that they were turning their backs on the place where God dwelt

in order to worship a pagan concept of God. Since Jerusalem was considered an *omphalos* or navel of the world where the realms of heaven and earth met, where Adam had been formed and where Abraham had been called to sacrifice his son, it was less important which way the Temple was oriented, and indeed the first Temple was probably built along the most expedient axis given the hilly nature of the region. To give an example from one such site: “God’s instructions were that His Tabernacle faced WEST - contrary to the pagan temples which all faced the sun in the east. As Masons face east toward the ‘worshipful master’ they face the symbol of the sun.”

This is a curious claim on two counts.

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Firstly, there is no explicit mention in Chronicles or Kings that God determined the orientation of the Temple. Secondly, one has to assume these people have curiously oriented places of worship, since as we just noted, every church, synagogue (and formerly mosque) was oriented to *Jerusalem*, towards the East in Europe and the Americas, as they have for upwards of two thousand years or more, towards that point where God first communicated with man. Perhaps these anti-Masons face the West and the setting sun when they pray, which is of course their right in a country which allows both freedom of religion and freedom of expression.

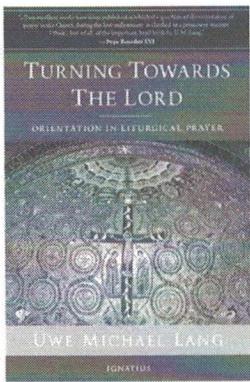


Figure 84 - A book which examines the orientation of believers when praying

From a Christian point of view, for example, Bishop Edward Slattery said: "... we find that the priest and the people faced in the same direction, usually toward the east, in the expectation that when Christ returns, He will return "from the east." At Mass, the Church keeps vigil, waiting for that return. This single position is called *ad orientem*, which simply means "toward the east." In *Turning Towards The Lord*, Lang says: "Despite all the variations in practice that have taken place far into the second millennium, one thing has remained clear for the whole of Christendom: praying towards the East is a tradition that goes back to the beginning.", and further: "Modern man has little understanding of this "orientation." Judaism and Islam, now as in the past, take it for granted that we should pray towards the central place of revelation, to the God who has revealed himself to us, in the manner and in the place in which he revealed himself."

Returning to the Royal Arch Degree, we note that later in this ritual the High Priest instructs the Sojourners that: "some more of the rubble be removed from the eastern part of the ruins", and it is there that they discover the Ark of the Covenant, which should properly be found in the Western part of the ruins.

So our religious experiences and our physical experiences tell us to seek light in the East. The fact that our Masonic experience runs contrary to this is probably secondary, and it simply made no sense to our forefather to build Masonic Temples which faced West rather than East. And there it is. Probably as simple as that!

Again, consider again the layout of the Temple. The entrance was in the East, and you traveled West to the Holy of Holies. While the physical sun rose in the East, true knowledge was to be sought at the place of the setting sun, which is where you also sought the body of Hiram Abif. "You cannot see my face, for no man may see me and live", said God (Exodus 33:20). To gaze upon pure, perfect, undiluted Truth we must ourselves pass beyond the veil of life. This profound Masonic teaching we will return to later. In the allegory of the Temple, we travel from East to West in fact, through the two columns, into the Middle Chamber, into the Holy Place, where we receive a substitute for Truth, being barred from the Veil(s) which separate us from the Holy of

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Holies. Finally, in the Royal Arch Degree we pass through the veil and into the Divine Presence, whose very gaze strikes us dead. But we have a secret: as Companions we know His Name. "And the Truth shall set you free" (John 8:32).

Much food for thought.

## A Living Arch

When the Candidate first enters the Lodge Room, he stands, blindfolded, between the two Columns of Boaz and Jachin which in some traditions represent the two columns of the Tree of Life, Severity and Mercy. Standing between them he represents the Middle Pillar, sometimes called Balance, Equilibrium or Mildness. It is this middle path to Truth which will occupy a lifetime of study and application for the serious Mason. For now he stands in the very place he will seek to return, but for now hoodwinked, and unaware where he stands.

Now, in a similar manner, the two has become three, duality divine, the opposing forces of the two pillars reconciled by the addition of the arch, the third force which holds the other two in balance. Once again the Candidates will pass this way hoodwinked, unable to see that which will be revealed to him

— indeed in which they themselves will participate — at the end of the ceremonies. As they enter the room the three Masters of the Veils form the Living Arch, and the three Candidates are told to "Stoop low, my Brothers, stoop low. He that humblest himself shall be exalted." The Candidates pass that way in single file, for they have not yet learned the Truth which will bind them together into a Living Arch themselves.

This is from the parable given in Luke Chapter 14, from which this quote comes. This reminds us that, although we are about to become Companions through a ceremony called Exaltation, we should remember that we should not allow this privilege or honor go to our heads. We may become more knowledgeable than our Brothers, but this does not make us any better than them: it simply

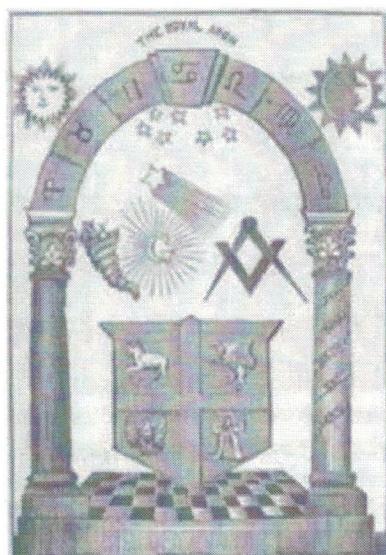


Figure 86 - The Arch resting upon the two Pillars

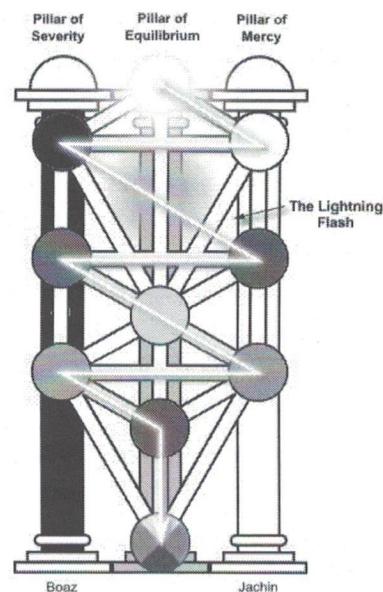


Figure 85 - The Kabbalistic Tree of Life, showing the Pillars of Boaz and Jachin, or Severity and Mercy

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means we may be half a step before them on the road to knowledge, and that it is our duty to help them to come to the same knowledge we now possess.

If you visit the Church of the Nativity in Manger Square, Bethlehem, you will find you have to “stoop low”: in order to enter it. The entrance was lowered centuries ago to its present height of less than four feet in order to make it easier to secure against invaders, and now it is a salutary reminder to all who visit it that they should humble themselves before God.

The *Graham Manuscript*, comprising two scraps of paper dating to around 1726 (though it could be older given the odd spelling used), contain a reference to Bezaleel, about whom is said:

“the two younger brothers of the fforesaid king Alboyin desired  
“for to be instructed by him his noble asiance by which he wrought  
“to which he agreed conditionally they were not to discover it without  
“another to themselves to make a trible voice”

(Transcribed by R.: W.: Gary L. Heinmiller)

The reference to their needing three to make a ‘trible voice’ refers to the manner in which the True Word is communicated – a fact not covered at all in the present day Master Masons Degree. All we are informed is that two alone cannot complete the Word. Later the Candidates will learn how to give this Word “over a Triangle and under a Living Arch.”

### **“I will Bring the Blind...”**

The words of the Principal Sojourner are taken from Isaiah, and include Chapter 42 verse 16 and Chapter 40, verse 31.

In this Degree, the Principal Sojourner, takes the Blue Lodge role of Senior Deacon, acting as both guide and intermediary for the Candidate, answering when challenged on his behalf. In the Ancient Mysteries this role was assumed by a person called the ‘Psychopomp’, not in the sense of the Ancient Mysteries where it was a guide from the land of the living to the dead (although that would also make sense in the Royal Arch Degree), but rather in the Jungian sense of being a mediator between the conscious and unconscious worlds. At the very basic level the Principal Sojourner leads a ‘blind’ Candidate and provides the appropriate passwords to gain access from one level to another.

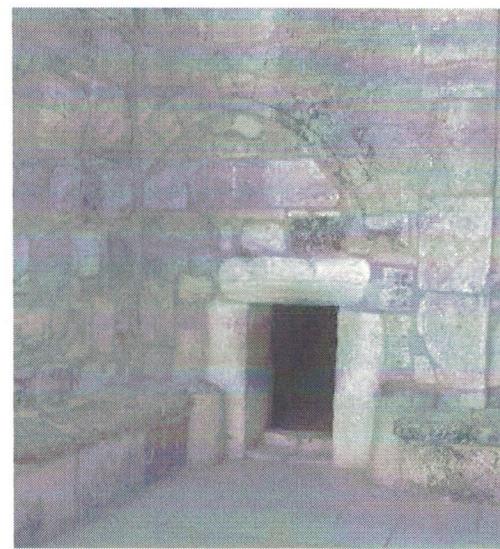


Figure 87 – ‘Stoop low’ - Entrance to the Basilica of the Nativity, Bethlehem

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Figure 88 - Anubis as Psychopomp, leading the deceased on his journey

He makes darkness light, which is most appropriate for a Mason seeking Light; and provides the very same encouragement which Isaiah did in his book of prophecy.

Isaiah lived and wrote during the period of Assyrian expansion and the decline of Judah. While Judah survived the threats from Assyria, Isaiah prophesied that Judah's sin would deliver her to Babylon. However, he also said that God would deliver a repentant people from Babylon just as he rescued them from Egypt. This is why these most appropriate passages are used at this time. Note that they immediately follow the opening prayer, which mentions that God appeared to Moses "in a flame of fire out of burning bush", thereby cementing together the two key themes of this Degree.

## The Story of Moses



Figure 89 - A wonderfully anachronistic image called 'The Exposition of Moses' by Poussin of 'Et In Arcadia Ego' fame to those who have read the extravagant theories about Rennes-le-Chateau and the Prieurie de Sion. Note the mock medieval castle in the background

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It is useful to remind ourselves briefly of the times in which Moses lived. Although Joseph had held a very high rank in Egypt, causing many Israelites to remain in that land, we are told that their race grew quickly in relation to the Egyptians, and after Joseph's death, the good that Joseph had done was quickly forgotten by later pharaohs in light of the high numbers of Israelites living under their rule. Concerned that they might take sides against Egypt in a future war, the Pharaoh enlisted them as slaves, and even demanded that any male child should be drowned at birth. Moses escaped this fate by being hidden from the guards, and then placed in an ark and hidden among the bulrushes. He was found by a daughter of the pharaoh and raised as her own.

When he was a young adult he saw Israelites being treated badly by an Egyptian guard and killed one, fleeing from the land to Midian, where he tended the flocks of Jethro, the father of his new bride Zipporah. It was while he was tending the sheep on Mount Horeb that God came to him in a burning bush, and told him to remove his shoes, since the place he stood was Holy ground.



Figure 90 - Byzantine mosaic of Moses and the Burning Bush - note the removal of his sandals

This was indeed a ‘calling’, for God called to Moses by name, and he answered: “Here am I.” Here God tells him that He will deliver his people out of bondage in Egypt and take them to “a land flowing with milk and honey.” He charges Moses with going to the new pharaoh – for his adoptive father had now died – and demand their release. But first Moses must convince the Israelites to follow him, and asks God his name. “I Am That I Am” is my name. However, His name is also given as Jahweh (or Jehovah), which is often substituted in the Bible for Adonaï, or The Lord, since Jews consider it blasphemous to utter the name of God, as that was originally reserved strictly to the High Priest, and only then once a year.

When Moses asks Him how he will convince the Israelites that he was indeed sent by God, he is given the three signs used during the Passing of the Veils to give them: the rod which becomes a serpent, the hand which becomes leprous, and the water which becomes blood. Moses also laments the fact that he is not gifted with eloquent speech, and God tells him to enlist Aaron his brother to speak on his behalf. Now both Moses and Aaron were of the tribe of Levi, and as

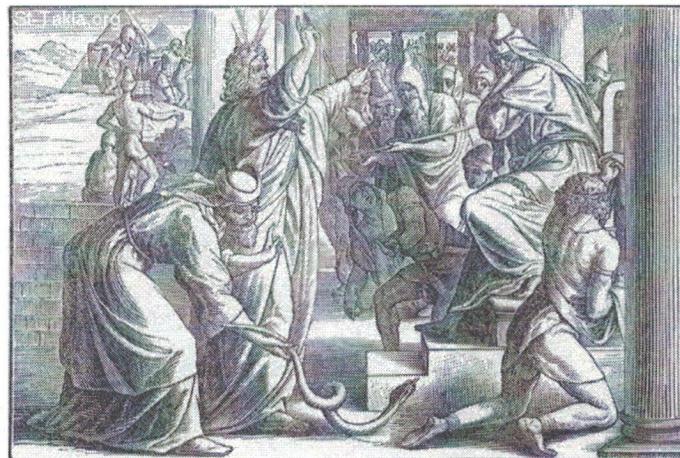


Figure 91 - Moses' rod becomes a serpent before pharaoh and his magicians

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Aaron became the first High Priest, it was the Levites who were set apart for the priesthood from that time on.

Moses therefore returns to Egypt, but has difficulty persuading the Israelites that he is their savior, and with the help of Aaron and by performing the signs God gave him, they convince the Israelites to believe them. Moses and Aaron then go before the pharaoh and ask for the release of the Israelites in the famous phrase: "Let my people go." Pharaoh refuses, and thus begins the twelve famous plagues of Egypt, ending with the death of the first-born, including the pharaoh's son. The Israelite firstborn are spared because they follow the injunction to kill a year-old kid or lamb, eat it roasted with bitter herbs, and smear its blood on the doorposts and lintel; consequently, the Passover is instituted, as an annual memorial of the Jews' release from Egyptian captivity, and as the first sign of God's active involvement in the daily lives of the Children of Israel.

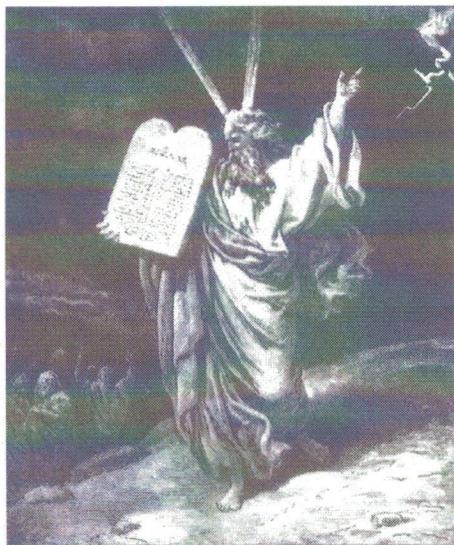


Figure 92 - Moses with the Ten Commandments. In reality there are 613 in the Bible!

Pharaoh relents and lets the Israelites leave, but then pursues them. Moses parts the Red Sea, and the Children of Israel are saved.

Early in their wanderings in the desert they arrive at Mount Sinai, and Moses ascends to commune with God. It is interesting that most people know that God gave Moses the Ten Commandments on the mountain, but little more. In fact Moses spent forty days upon the Mountain, and during this time God passed on a large number of laws to be followed, including most detailed instructions for the construction of the Ark of the Covenant, what it should contain, the holy vessels and the precise blueprints and assembly instructions for the tabernacle.

It is well worth reading Exodus, since within that relatively short book are detailed explanations of most of the characters and artifacts which features so prominently in the first part of this Degree.

It is also worth noting that, from the long lists of tribes and peoples the emigrant Israelites meet, trade with and fight during their travels, this region of the Near East was well populated by a large number of diverse cultures at that time.

At the end of his life Moses is permitted to see, but forbidden to enter the Holy Land. This may seem harsh indeed from a God who regularly proves so forgiving and indulgent towards the ungrateful Children of Israel, when Moses, who begged God to be allowed to enter that land, is

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denied his request. After all, he had faithfully followed every one of God's commands for well over forty years. However, one must remember that Moses stood in a special relationship with God: he is described as a prophet. On one occasion Moses allowed his temper to get the better of him, and in Numbers 20, we learn that, although God had told Moses precisely how to obtain water for the thirsty Israelites, Moses chose to add his own words and to strike the rock twice, an action God had not asked him to do. While this might seem a relatively minor infraction, for a prophet it was not: it was essential that a Prophet repeat the words God requires him to speak, without interpretation, adding or taking away from the message. Indeed in Deuteronomy 18:20, God says: "But the prophet, which shall presume to speak a word in my name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or that shall prophesy in the name of other gods, even that prophet shall die." So this was why Moses wasn't allowed to lead his people into the Promised Land.

Instead, it was his nominated successor, Joshua, who took the Children of Israel across the River Jordan.



Figure 93 - The death of Moses

## Removing the Shoes

We saw that, when Moses encountered the burning bush, he is told by God: "put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." (Exodus 3:5).

This action is to be seen in a number of religions. For example, you remove your shoes to enter a Mosque. You also remove them to enter a Hindu Temple. In part the symbolism is one of removing the eternal clothing which attracts the most dirt and dust from the profane or outside world. This action is also reflected in the custom of bathing one's head, hands and feet prior to entering a holy site.



Figure 94 - Shoes outside a mosque

The story is repeated and acted out at the beginning of the Degree, for the Candidates wear sandals, which are removed at this point.

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## Seven Circuits

At the start of the ritual the Candidates make seven circuits of the Chapter. The first is made prior to the Obligation, upon their entrance as they are received under the living arch and make their way to the Western Altar. The second takes them to the diorama of the burning bush, at which point they remove their sandals.

Following the revelation of the burning bush their sandals are now replaced – at least in the modern version of the ritual.

The following three circuits continue the story of Moses up to the arrival of Joshua and the Children of Israel bearing the Ark of the Covenant into the Promised Land, and ends with the comment that, while they obeyed God's laws the people flourished.

At the sixth circuit they are told that, because the Israelites turned from God, they suffered the destruction of the Temple and city of Jerusalem, and were led away into captivity. But after seventy years they were freed by a Proclamation of Cyrus, King of Persia. The seventh and final circuit represents the exiles deciding to return to Jerusalem to assist in rebuilding the Temple, remembering the prophecy of Jeremiah 29:10 – 13.

However, in earlier versions of the ritual the circuits – or circumambulations – were rather more dramatic! Once the sandals had been removed at the burning bush, they remained off. Following the circuit describing the Jews being led into captivity, the Candidates were led out of the Chapter to simulate being led to Babylon. However, this was also a device to allow a unique piece of furniture to be set up. Called the 'rocky road', it consists of a number of pieces of flat wood, on which had been attached wooden bosses of varying sizes placed randomly upon them. This gave the 'road' a very uneven and treacherous surface to walk across – especially when blindfolded!

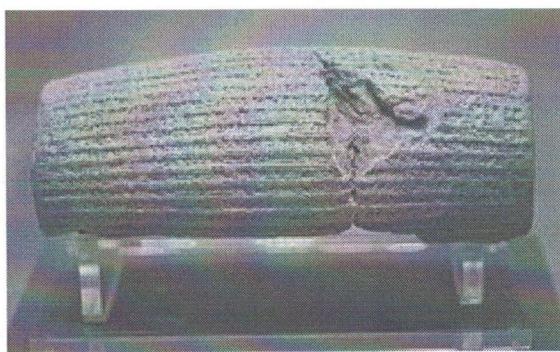


Figure 95 - The Cyrus cylinder, proclaiming the restoration of cult sanctuaries and repatriation of displaced peoples

The Proclamation of Cyrus was then read and the Candidates led into the Chapter, being advised that there were two routes to Jerusalem, and telling them to take the one through the wilderness to avoid being captured in the cities or towns. After prayer, they were warned that they were approaching a dangerous part of the road, and helped across the 'rugged road'. They performed this circuit three times, after which they were led out of the room as the Chapter continued with the Ceremony of Passing the Veils. The wording accompanying this very physical

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journey beautifully describe the passage from Babylon to Jerusalem:

"We are now on the green banks of the ever-running waters of the Euphrates. We are now passing through Syria, towards Damascus. We shall pass near the ancient city of Tamor or Palmyra, and through many beautiful groves and pleasant vineyards."

The journey ends with:

"But rough and rugged as was the road and long and toilsome as was the journey, it at last came to an end, and the weary sojourners were blest by the sight of the ruined walls of Jerusalem and the glistening tents of their Brethren. Here they turned aside to rest: here let us turn aside to rest and refresh ourselves."

In esoteric terms this is often described as a *Pathworking*, which is sometimes defined as a technique of active imagination. Deprived of sight, the Candidates undergo a journey with physical stimuli (rocky road, circumambulations) while having scenes described to them which they can perceive in their mind's eye. This makes the experience very powerful since the Candidates are being allowed to relive the experience instead of simply being told about it. This technique is used throughout Masonic ritual, and a few minutes' contemplation on the Degree rituals will bring many examples to mind.

Although this dramatic journey is now but a memory in our modern ritual, it can still be seen performed each December in Ancient Chapter No. 1, which precedes the formation of the Grand Chapter of New York.

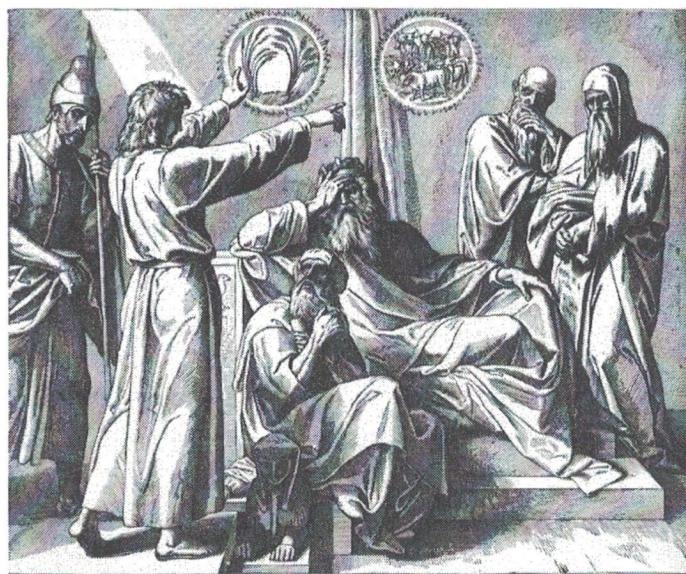


Figure 96 - Joseph interprets the pharaoh's dreams

Finally, the number seven itself is a powerful figure in both the Bible and in Freemasonry. This is the seventh Degree in the York Rite. There are seven days in a week; there were seven days in the story of Creation; and seven ancient planets. Indeed, the number seven was closely associated with divine perfection and the completion of a cycle. For example, we have Joseph's interpretation of the Pharaoh's dream of seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine in Genesis 41: 1 – 32. To us the most important symbol is that of King Solomon's Temple being built in seven

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years. We mentioned in the section on the Most Excellent Master Degree that the circumambulations in that Degree reflected the six days in the story of creation, and now we have reached the seventh cycle, that of rest. As we saw, it is for this reason that the Temple is seen by many commentators to be a symbol of creation. And this is why it is also seen as a symbol for Man, with the three parts of the Temple relating to the three traditional parts of man, or the head (seat of the spirit), breast (seat of the heart) and trunk (seat of procreation). Or again the Holy of Holies, Holy Place and Courtyard have been assigned to spirit, soul and body.

The final, or seventh, circumambulation brings us to the entrance of the Tabernacle. As we approach the Master of the First Veil, armed with the password we learned from the image of the burning bush, we are again reminded how closely entwined are the stories of the Tabernacle in the Desert and the Tabernacle of Zerubbabel, which we are about enter.

To conclude this section it is worth mentioning a theory put forward by Rev. Neville Barker Cryer, an English Masonic scholar. He suggests that the reason a story involving a return from exile would have been a popular theme at the time the rituals were crystallizing was because this was a major preoccupation in England at the time. Firstly there was a wave of Jewish immigrants in the mid to late 17<sup>th</sup> Century seeking refuge during the Lord Protector's (Oliver Cromwell) time. Secondly this era saw the influx of Huguenots fleeing from France to Britain, and of course the Jacobites and Non-Jurors (those who refused to swear an Oath of Allegiance to William and Mary who came from Orange in what is now the Netherlands, to replace James II) fleeing in the opposite direction following the removal of King James II. This accords with the brief look at English History earlier in this section.

### **The Veils**

The Veils are a representation of the Tabernacle. This part of the ceremony is a conflation of the stories of the Tabernacle, which was created under the instruction of Moses to contain the Ark of the Covenant, and the Second Temple, built on the ruins of King Solomon's Temple by his descendant Zerubbabel.

While there is no explicit mention in the admittedly sketchy descriptions of the rebuilding of the Second Temple in the Bible, the idea of the council meeting in a Tabernacle is quite plausible. It would have taken some years to rebuild the Temple and City, and the sacred vessels carried back from Babylon would have to have been stored somewhere inside. Since the leaders of the exiles included prophets, priests, scribes, and a prince, it is most likely they would have sought a solution from the Torah, Scribe Ezra (Esdras in Greek) is credited with bringing the Torah, or first five books of the Bible generally ascribed to Moses, back to Jerusalem following the exile, and would

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Figure 97 - Interpretation of the Biblical description of the veil showing all four colors and cherubim motif

have had an extensive knowledge of them. It would be likely they would seek a solution to their problem in the sacred writings, and were inspired to create a second Tabernacle following the precise instructions in Exodus, in which it was explained how to create and store the Holy vessels.

While Exodus 26:31 seems to suggest there is but a single veil between the outer court and the Holy Place, the colors listed to be included are: blue, purple, red, and ‘fine twisted linen’. While this fourth color is normally interpreted as being white, during the recent refurbishment of the Chapter Room at New York Grand Lodge, this curtain was replaced by a linen-style curtain which, being off-white, more accurately reflects the original description.

If we examine the layout of the tabernacle as a whole, we find three veils, two of which later become walls in King Solomon’s Temple. The first admits us into the outer courtyard; the second into the area reserved for priests; and the third into the Holy of Holies. However, these do not have unique colors according to the Bible.

In the Royal Arch Ritual the four veils are used as barriers to entrance, and the Candidate must first negotiate his way through the four veils before finally arriving in the presence of the Grand Council. Symbolically they have been referred to the levels of progress in Masonry, to the four elements, and to the trials of Moses.



Figure 98 - Ham, Shem and Japheth with Noah from the Nuremberg Chronicles

In this case the veils, which match the colors of the four banners, are used to draw attention to the close association between the Blue and Red Lodges, as we pass from the color blue, indicating Operative Masonry, purple, indicating an admixture of blue and red to show the ‘intimate connection’ between Blue and Capitular Masonry, and finally to red, showing that the Candidate has now passed into the realm of the Royal Arch, also evidenced by the fact that the password are the names of those associated with the rebuilding of the Temple. Finally, the fourth veil is

white, and is also used as a device to show us we are now moving beyond the three Degrees and onto a fourth level.

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The First Veil, guarded by the Master of the First Veil, is negotiated by giving the Password of the Degree, which he heard given during the diorama of Moses and the Burning Bush. Here he is given the passwords and actions to pass the succeeding veils. In some traditions the reference to Ham, Seth and Japheth recalls Noah's Ark as the 'Ark of Safety'.

The Second Veil sees Moses, Aholiab and Bezaleel referenced and their creation of the 'Ark of Testimony'. And let us not forget that Moses was found in an Ark hidden in the bulrushes by an Egyptian princess.

The Master of the Third Veil mentions the Grand Council who presided over the Ark of the Covenant rediscovered.

At the Fourth Veil, in addition to the passwords and sign, he is also asked to present the Ring to show that he is indeed worthy to approach the Grand Council.

The perceptive student may notice a couple of anomalies here.

Firstly, if the white veil gives access to 'the Sanctuary of our Sacred Tabernacle', surely that should separate the Holy of Holies, which only the High Priest was allowed to enter. Firstly, the Ark of the Covenant had not be discovered at this point in the ritual, so no disrespect was being committed. Secondly, while they were following the layout of the Tabernacle, there was no reason they couldn't adapt the design to their own present needs, and since they had no expectation that the Ark would be found and the True Name discovered at that time, having an inner court where the ruler could sit, well protected from the enemies who the Bible tells us continually harassed the Jews while they tried to rebuild their city and Temple.

Indeed, while the modern day English ritual no longer uses the veils, the Bristol Rite does. In this case the veil ceremony is performed in a room outside the Chapter room, and the white veil hung over its door, so that, having gone through the ritual of Passing the Veils, and received the password needed to enter the Chapter, the Candidate finally passes through the white veil into the Chapter Room, which here represents the Sanctuary for this portion of the rite.

The second question might arise over why the Sojourner would present Zerubbabel's ring if Zerubbabel himself were seated within the Sanctuary! While the symbolism of the signet ring is discussed later, suffice it to note at this point that a monarch or ruler would have a number of

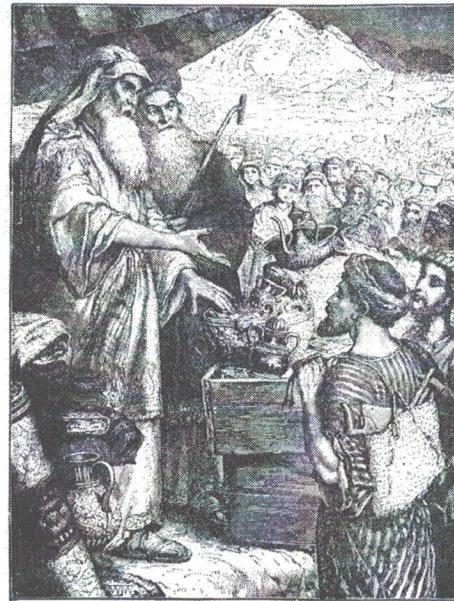


Figure 99 - Bezaleel and Aholiab work on the Tabernacle and its furnishings

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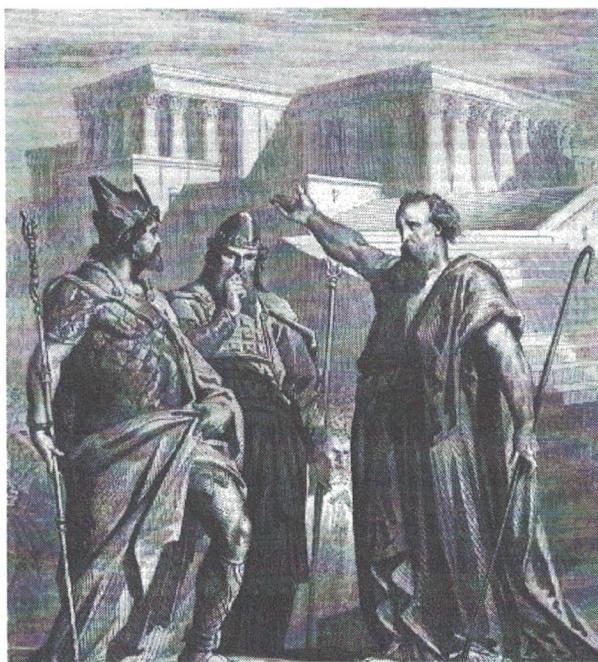


Figure 100 - Jeshua, Zerubbabel and Haggai

signets produced to give to his delegates working in different parts of the kingdom and as ambassadors to other countries. Here we may imagine that Zerubbabel had given a number of rings to different tribes or groups who would travel separately back to Jerusalem, and this would be a clear sign that they were to be trusted before being let into the presence of the Grand Council.

In our ritual, however, the ring is held by the Master of the Third Veil which he then presents to the Candidate to give to the Royal Arch Captain guarding the Fourth Veil. While this seems illogical, it was probably a stage direction changed at some time to avoid the Principal Sojourner or a Candidate having to carry it from the beginning of the ceremony.

Although the veils are blue, purple, red and white, like the banners to which they allude they also refer to the four principal tribes (as we shall see in the sections on the banner below):

- The First Veil is blue and the banner represents the tribe of Dan, symbolized by the Eagle.
- The Second Veil is purple and the banner represents the tribe of Reuben, symbolized by Man.
- The Third Veil is red and the banner represents the tribe of Ephraim, symbolized by the Ox.
- The Fourth Veil is white, and the banner represents the tribe of Judah, symbolized by the Lion.

There is a final attribution of the veils which we might consider. The first great Covenant of God with His people was that with Noah and his progeny, upon the blue waters, with his Ark of seven colors (reflecting the seven lights of the menorah or the seven planets) in the heavens. This reminds us of the Blue Veil. The second great Covenant was between God and Abraham, whom God tells "I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee and make thy name great" (Genesis 12: 1 – 2). The covenant is sealed by Melchizedek the High Priest, who give him bread and wine. This Royal Covenant is symbolized by the Purple Veil. The third great Covenant was that with the Children of Israel and Moses, and was the Covenant borne of the blood with which they painted the lintels of their houses to indicate their trust in Yahweh. This is symbolized by the Red Veil. The last great covenant may be drawn from Revelations, perhaps, in which we read: "And I saw a

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new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.” (Revelation 21: 1 - 2). Note that we have progressed from flood, sea, river to ‘no more sea’. At each Covenant the waters become less. Now there is no separation between us and God. And the Veil which must be drawn for us to enter into the presence of the great I AM is white. We will come across this ‘diminution’ again a little later.

It should be stressed that these colors are unique to United States Royal Arch, and do not accord with the Bible what the Talmudists say, or even the Canadian Royal Arch! However, using the American version for now, the Eagle (sometimes symbolized by the Scorpion or Snake) has long been associated with the classical element of Water; Man with Air; the Ox with Earth; and the Lion with Fire. Much has been written on these symbols; but since the attribution of color to each Tribe is very variable, any symbolic association should be undertaken with caution!

### The Signs

The Signs come from Exodus 4: 1 – 9, and are given between the First and Second, Second and Third, and Third and Fourth Veils. Each refers to the three Signs Moses was told to give to the Children of Israel in order to convince them that it was truly God who had sent him to them to lead them out of captivity. Again, the number three is used to great effect in the Bible. In this case the people deny Moses three times, which is often used by those who seek to link the Old and New Testaments to reflect Peter denying he knew Jesus three times before the cock crowed. It is as if, as well as the password, the Candidate must convince each Master of the Veil that he is indeed coming as a representative of God by repeating the miraculous signs Moses gave to the Israelites in order to gain access to the next Veil. The three signs are of a rod turning into a serpent (and back again), a hand turning white and leprous (and back again), and water turning into blood. In a way this reflects the grip and word of the Blue Lodge Degrees, in that a word is not sufficient: a physical sign must also be given in order to be admitted to the next level.

Once again we see the melding together of the story of Moses and the Story of Zerubbabel. It is only at the fourth veil that the Mosaic references are finally set completely aside and we move several hundred years forward in the action.

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## The Banners



JUDAH

EPHRAIM

REUBEN

DAN

*Fig. 103 – The Four Banners*

We are taught that the four banners represent the principle tribes of Israel. Yet they are really representative of all Twelve Tribes of Israel, which marched in a set order during the sojourn in the desert under Moses and Aaron, and which camped in a set pattern about the Tabernacles as it traveled whenever the caravanserai halted. Indeed, in other Royal Arch traditions, notably in England and Scotland, all twelve banners are present.

These tribes have long been equated with the twelve months and twelve signs of the zodiac in the Zohar, a second century C.E. book attributed to Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, yet reflecting teachings which went back much earlier. Astrology also features extensively in Talmudic teaching.

When the twelve tribes of Israel marched out of Egypt under Moses, and through the desert, they were divided into four groups, each under a leading tribe. The four main tribes were Judah (accompanied by Issachar and Zebulon), next Reuben (accompanied by Simeon and Gad), then Ephraim (accompanied by Manasseh and Benjamin), and finally Dan (accompanied by Asher and Naphthali). When they camped, the ordered themselves with Judah in the East, Reuben in the South, Ephraim in the West and Dan in the North.

Very early on the commentators linked the twelve tribes with the months, and the groups of three tribes with the four seasons. This also meant that they linked them to the signs of the zodiac, a device begun with the ancient Mesopotamians, who had divided the night sky into twelve bands of 30° in order to mark the seasons, and therefore the times to plant the crops – an important advance in knowledge for a people which had changed from a migratory to a sedentary society. At a very early stage the four main tribes were associated with particular signs: Judah with what we now know as Leo or the Lion, Reuben with Aquarius or Man, Ephraim with Taurus or the Ox, and Dan with Scorpio or the Eagle (a common interchange in early times of astrology). The early

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Jewish scholars also associated the nine minor tribes with the other Zodiacial signs, thought their associations have been debated by scholars for centuries. However, the associations of the four principal tribes probably comes from Genesis Chapters 48 and 49. In these Israel (or Jacob) blesses his sons (actually he tells them what horrible futures they will have!), effectively setting the layout of Israel under the tribes.

Ephraim is recognized as the first tribe, telling him to ‘increase greatly on the earth.’ One could suggest that this gave Ephraim the kingdom of earth, which is often represented by the sign of the Ox. However, in Deuteronomy 33.17, where Jacob blesses his sons, he says “His glory is like the firstling of his bullock, and his horns are like the horns of unicorns: with them he shall push the people together to the ends of the earth: and they are the ten thousands of Ephraim.” This is certainly a clearer association of Ephraim with the Ox.

Reuben is identified in Jacob’s blessings as his firstborn – a man (Genesis 49.2). Judah is identified as a “lion’s whelp” (Genesis 49.9); and finally Dan is called “a serpent”, which was often associated with the scorpion, and as explained above, therefore with the eagle (Genesis 49:16).

Another point worthy of mention is, while Judah was seen as the ‘protecting’ tribe, the primus inter pares was still the first to receive Jacob’s blessing in Genesis 48 – Ephraim. Remember that, due to the procession of the equinoxes, that wobble of the earth’s axis which means different zodiacal signs rise at the spring equinox to begin the year every few thousand years, at that time it was Taurus which led the zodiacal procession across the heavens, a point which some have mystically associated with the fact that this was a time of intense animal sacrifice – especially bulls. Those same scholars have pointed out the contemporaneous timing of the Minoan culture, which also sacrificed bulls.

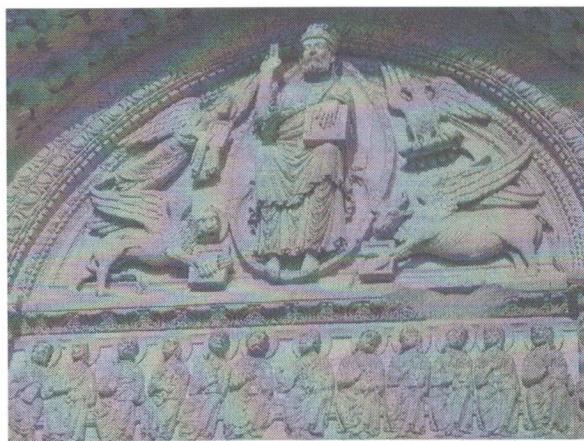


Figure 104 - Tympanum on a church in Arles, France

Later this symbolism was extended into the New Testament, with the four Evangelists represented in art by the same four animals: Matthew as the man, Mark as the lion, Luke as the ox, and John as the eagle.

The idea that the four principal tribes represented Man, Lion, Ox and Eagle is important because Hebrew scholars through the millennia have sought to draw parallels through the biblical texts. In this case we now see that, during the Exodus, around the Tabernacle, which was seen as the seat

of God, were stationed the Lion, the Man, the Ox and the Eagle, in the four quarters. This of course refers to Ezekiel 1:10 and 10:14, and Revelations 4:7. So the banners of the “four principal tribes

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of Israel we use in Chapter have a very profound message, which goes beyond the fact that these tribes led the Israelites out of bondage and protected the tabernacles when the encampment was at rest: they represent the very avatars which surrounded the throne of God, of which the Tabernacles was an earthly representation.

And finally, we should not forget that, when George Washington, the first President of the United States, took the Presidential Oath, he chose this very passage – Genesis Chapters 48 and 49 – on which to lay his hand when taking his oath. Some have suggested the Bible was opened at random. It seems unlikely, given that the entire ceremony was planned by Masons well-versed in the Volume of the Sacred Law! Perhaps he chose the passage because it talked of the founding of a new Nation, which brought twelve sons and a father together – and there were thirteen colonies uniting to create a Nation State. But then he was also a Mason, and initiated in the Lodge in Fredericksburg, the very Lodge whose records reflect the first Royal Degree being worked in the New World.

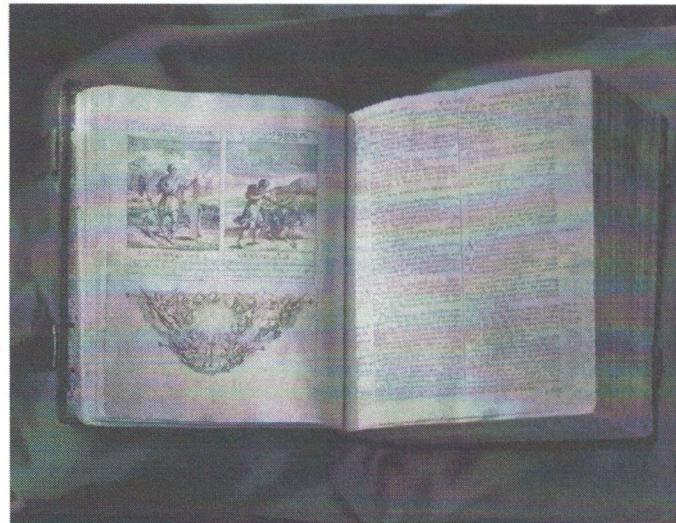


Figure 105 - George Washington Inaugural Bible opened at Genesis, Verse 49

### Shem, Ham and Japheth

Shem, Ham and Japheth were the sons of Noah, who, with their wives, went into the Ark with him and thus became the only survivors of the Flood.



Figure 106 - Engraving of Noah's Ark from the Nuremberg Chronicle

It may seem odd that they would be mentioned in the Royal Arch Degree. It must be remembered that the Holy Royal Arch Degree took its sources from a number of earlier rituals. One of these was – and is – called the Royal Ark Mariner Degree, and is based on the story of the Ark, and features these character in the ceremony. It is also believed by many scholars that this Degree originated in the Mystery or Miracle Plays performed by the guilds outside cathedrals

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and churches on Holy Day for the entertainment and education of the masses. It should be remembered that in earlier times the only language used in church was Latin, and the majority of the public being illiterate, the Miracle Plays were their main source of learning the more famous Biblical stories.

A key feature of this Degree was the rainbow, being God's promise and *covenant* with His people stretching across the sky.

Indeed, another consideration is how all these stories are about journeys to find some form of Truth. In the story of Noah the ark (incidentally, in many languages the word for 'ark' and 'arch' is the same), a group of people are carried over the waters by an Ark to Ararat, a safe haven. In the story of Moses and the Chosen People, an Ark (of the Covenant) is carried across the earth by men, on their way to the Land of Milk and Honey. In the story of the Rebuilding of the Temple, the descendants of Israel travel a dangerous and rocky road, carrying the vessels of the destroyed First Temple from the East (Babylon) to the West (Jerusalem) with the intention of rebuilding the House of God.



Figure 107 - Noah offers a sacrifice to God (one hopes he had three of whatever he sacrificed on board...)

As an aside, it is also curious to note that in each case we see a reiteration which, like ripples on a pond, become less with each repetition. In the story of Noah, his family are on a flood which covers the earth; in Exodus Moses parts a sea; and in the return to Jerusalem the remnants of Israel cross a river (the Jordan). Or again, if the Temple is an image of Creation, then we move from God's abode in Eden, with a garden adjacent in which lived Adam and Eve; then God lives in a vast Temple; and finally in a rather smaller Temple erected on the ruins of the greater by a band of emigrants. Once again we have this theme of 'diminution' as man and God communicate on an increasingly even level.

It is therefore not difficult to see how this symbol of the arch, together with the key players, made its way into early forms of the Royal Arch Degree.

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## Moses, Aholiab and Bezaleel

To better understand why these three character feature in the Royal Arch Degree, it is useful to recall the short Catechism said at all Royal Arch Festive Boards in England:

- “Companion Principal Sojourner, how many Grand Lodges do we commemorate?
- “Three, Most Excellent.
- “Name them.
- “The First or Holy Lodge, the Second or Sacred Lodge, and the Third or Grand and Royal Lodge.
- “Where was the First or Holy Lodge held?
- “At the foot of Mount Horeb, in the wilderness of Sinai.
- “Who presided?
- “Moses, Aholiab and Bezaleel.
- “Where was the Second or Sacred Lodge held?
- “In the bosom of the Holy Mount Moriah.
- “Who presided?
- “Solomon, King of Israel, Hiram, King of Tyre, and Hiram Tyrian, Widow’s Son.
- “Where was the Third or Grand and Royal Lodge held?
- “At Jerusalem.
- “Who presided?
- “Zerubbabel, prince of the people; Haggai, the prophet; and Jeshua, the son of Josedech, the high priest.”

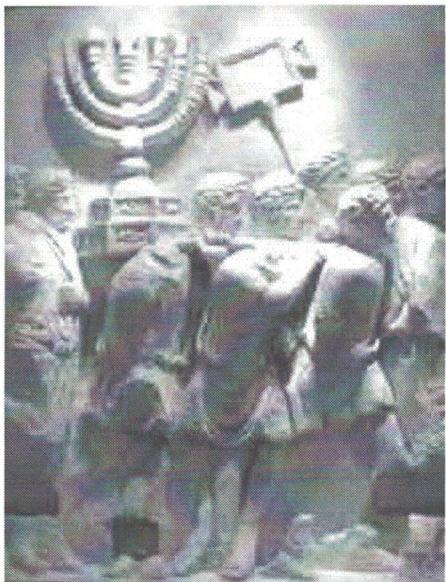
It is interesting to note that our ritual covers both the travels of Moses and those of Zerubbabel, while the story of King Solomon is absent, having been covered in the Master Mason Degree. A possible reason for this has been reviewed in the section *Possible Connection to the Third Degree* above.

Moses, of course, was the prophet who led the Israelites out of captivity into the desert, who organized the tribes during that journey, and who supervised the creation and erection of the Tabernacle, assigning the Tribes to the duties ascribed to it. It was he who dictated the design of the Tabernacle and the creation of the holy vessels, the primary ones being the Altar of Incense, the Seven-branched Candlestick, the Table of Shewbread and, of course, the Ark of the Covenant. It was also he who placed an omer of manna, Aaron’s rod, and a copy of the Law received from God into the Ark.

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In Exodus 31 we learn God called Bezaleel from the tribe of Judah and Aholiab of the tribe of Dan (two of the four principal tribes) to serve him. The description of their skills is remarkably similar to those of Hiram Abif, filling them: “in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship, to design artistic works, to work in gold, in silver, in bronze, in cutting jewels for setting, in carving wood...” (Exodus 31, 7 – 11).



*Figure 101 - The Seven-Branched Candelabra of the Temple as spoils of war on Trajan's Column in Rome*

Bezaleel and Aholiab are to make: “The tabernacle of meeting, the ark of the Testimony and the mercy seat that is on it, and all the furniture of the tabernacle; the table and its utensils, the pure gold lampstand with all its utensils, the altar of incense, the altar of burnt offering with all its utensils, and the laver and its base; the garments of ministry, the holy garments for Aaron the priest and the garments of his sons, to minister as priests, and the anointing oil and sweet incense for the holy place.” (Exodus 31, 12 – 17).

Since Bezaleel and Aholiab are therefore going to work closely with Moses in creating the Tabernacle and all the furniture within, and since the two of them will provide and craft the objects under the supervision of Moses, it becomes apparent why their relationship is similar to that of King Solomon, who supervised, with Hiram King of Tyre, who provided, and Hiram Abif, who crafted. Remember, too, that

Bezaleel and Aholiab were senior members of two of the four principal tribes, and therefore carried respect and authority in their own right. Since early Freemasonry came to see this triumvirate as the rulers of the “First or Holy Lodge”, it is not surprising therefore that we still encounter them in the Royal Arch Degree, since they were the creators of the objects associated with the Ark which are brought to light in this Degree.

### Jeshua, Zerubbabel and Haggai

We are familiar with these characters, since it is Jeshua who governs the Chapter as High Priest, Zerubbabel who assists him as King, and Haggai who competes the Grand Council as Scribe. In fact, in the Old Testament, Haggai is Prophet to Zerubbabel, and it is he who rouses Zerubbabel to speak with King Darius to seek permission to return to Jerusalem, as we read in the Book of Haggai. However, the Bible is unclear whether he actually returns with Zerubbabel and Jeshua, both of whom lead the remnants of the Israelites back to Jerusalem. We read of Zerubbabel in the Books of Ezra, Nehemiah and 1 Chronicles; and in the Prophecies of Haggai and Zechariah. The

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clearest description of the journey and rebuilding of the Temple are to be found in Ezra, here returning under the authority of King Cyrus of Persia, rather than Darius.

We also find brief mentions in two Apocryphal books, Sirach and I Esdras. It is in Esdras that we find the famous debate over the power of wine, women, and the king, in which Zerubbabel declares that Truth is greater than all things, and in terms of our ritual this joins his name to the concept of truth, so that the ring or signet with which he is presented by Cyrus as evidence of his royal commission is called the “ring of Zerubbabel, or Truth.”



Figure 102 - Zerubbabel receives authority from King Cyrus to return to Jerusalem

As we saw above, this is the Third, or Grand and Royal Lodge presided over by Jeshua, Zerubbabel and Haggai.

In fact it is worth perhaps noting that, since we are descended from Operative Masons, in all three cases the rulers meet in Lodges, not Palaces, Temples or Throne Rooms.

### The Signet



Figure 103 - Signet ring and seal from [www.foxfirejewelers.com](http://www.foxfirejewelers.com)

The use of a signet ring, which bore a seal, was a common method of sealing treaties and official documents from early in man's history. A document would be prepared, then melted wax poured upon it and the ring impressed in the wax to form a seal, which would attest to the document's authenticity. This was both an enduring symbol of authority, and also a useful measure when the monarch was often illiterate and incapable of writing his own name.

As a symbol of authority, the ruler's signet was often reproduced, either perfectly or with qualifying signs, and circulated to those who had authority over regions of his land, so that satraps, princes or minor rulers could issue local edicts in the name of the king. This led to the practice of giving a ring bearing the monarch's seal to those who needed to travel across his lands, as a sign to those

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guarding the cities or places of passage that he traveled with official permission. While official papers were often issued for this purpose, a ring indicated the travelers had the personal permission of the ruler, and therefore should be allowed to pass without hindrance.

Note that the pharaoh gave a signet ring to Joseph when he put him in charge of protecting Egypt from the predicted famine (Genesis 41: 41 – 42).

In the Royal Arch the signet represents the fact that the traveler has the permission of Zerubbabel. This is of course unlikely, since there is no reason a prince would give his ring to a latecomer to the Exodus from Babylon to Jerusalem, nor even a copy of it. However, in the Degree the ring has a second purpose: to remind us that Zerubbabel stands for Truth, and that by implication those who bear his ring are both seeking an audience with the Sanhedrin for a high purpose, and that their endeavors will bring about the discovery of Truth, or the True Word. In this it is a commonly used plot device, where a small object is a harbinger of future action.

Where does this idea come from? In Hebrew, the word ‘truth’ is *emet* or *emeth* (אמת). Jewish sages noted that these three letters, *aleph*, *mem* and *tav* (remember Hebrew is written right to left) are also the last letters of the three words which conclude the account of Creation, ‘*bara Elohim la'asot*’ (ברא אלhim לעשות). These three letters (*aleph*, *mem* and *tav*) also mark the beginning, middle and end of the Hebrew alphabet. According to the Jewish sages, “the seal of God is Truth”, a phrase which should be very familiar to us by now. In this context, *emet* is seen as the experience of self-fulfillment, of completing God’s plan for mankind. In one kabbalistic commentary, it is described as being “the power to realize one's own deepest potential, which is in fact the power of the Jewish soul to bring about the ultimate realization of God's potential.”



It is interesting to see just how profound the background to this symbol in the Royal Arch truly is. It is yet another proof that these rituals were not lightly thrown together, but were assembled by men who were deeply versed in all manner of religious, spiritual, esoteric and historical subjects, who were determined to preserve this ancient wisdom in our rituals. We are fortunate indeed to have this treasury of philosophical and practical teachings to study.

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## Candlestick, Altar of Incense, Breastplate and Ark of the Covenant

If you read Exodus Chapter 25, you will find a detailed description of the Tabernacle, the Ark of the Covenant, the Breastplate, and the Seven-Branched Candlestick, the Table of Shewbread (which oddly is not mentioned at all in our ritual). Chapters 26 and 27 read almost like a modern craftwork manual in its detailed description of the building of the Tabernacle, adding that these plans were given to Moses along with the Ten Commandments on top of Mount Sinai.

The Breastplate – or *Breastplate of Judgment* to give its full title – which is still worn by the Presiding Officer in most Chapters is described as a plate of gold into which are set four rows of three stones, each engraved with the name of one of the twelve tribes of Israel.

The Seven-branched Candlestick – or Menorah – was made according to a design provided by God to Moses. It is perhaps interesting to note that all the elements of the candlestick were to be made of beaten gold. As well as being a precious metal, it is also an inert metal and a very good conductor. One may perhaps wonder how such an imposing item could be made out of solid gold, since the Israelites were meant to have fled during the night from Egypt, and it would be hard to imagine their first thought was to how much gold they could carry, especially since they were slaves and therefore unlikely to possess much. This is awkwardly handled in the Bible in Exodus 3:22, where it says God told Moses to get the Israelites to ‘borrow’ as much silver, gold and cloth as they can manage to obtain from their Egyptian neighbors, which is later put towards the building of the Tabernacle. This ‘borrowing’ is rather like that college roommate we all dreaded, who seemed to think our belongings were also his to use or wear!

One may also remember that, during Moses’ absence communing with God, they persuaded Aaron to make a golden calf out of their jewelry, which was later melted down into ash and the Israelites made to drink it in water (Exodus 32:1 – 20). It is also noteworthy that the seven arms are to be decorated with almond blossoms and almond buds – reminiscent of Aaron’s wand which was later placed in the Ark. By the time the Menorah was placed in the Temple, it had nine companions, since we are told in II Chronicles 4:7 that King Solomon (who did nothing by halves) had no less than ten Seven-branched Candlesticks placed in the Temple.

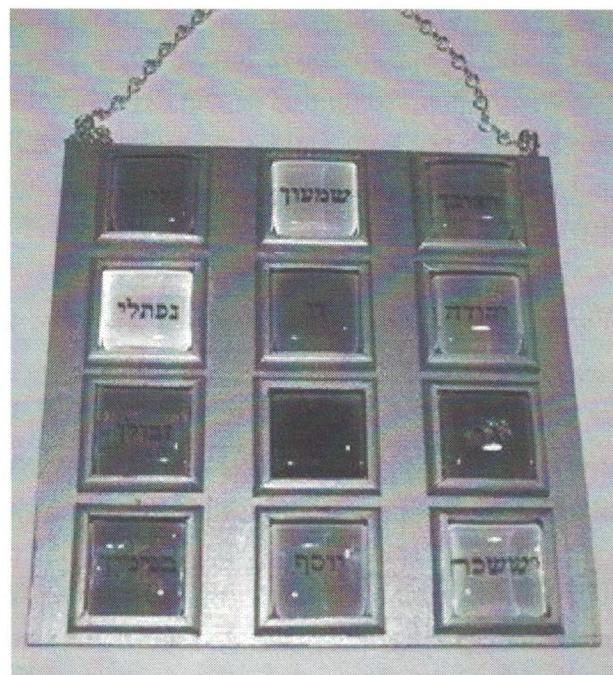


Figure 104 - High Priest's Breastplate

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The Menorah was filled with the purest olive oil, and was never allowed to go out. This practice is continued in many religious traditions, including Christian churches and synagogue, as a symbol of the eternal presence of God within the sanctuary. It is also seen as a memorial to the dead, where the eternal flame is often present at Tombs to the Unknown Solider seen in many countries (incidentally the first eternal flame ever to commemorate an individual as opposed to an unknown warrior was that placed upon the tomb of President John F. Kennedy).

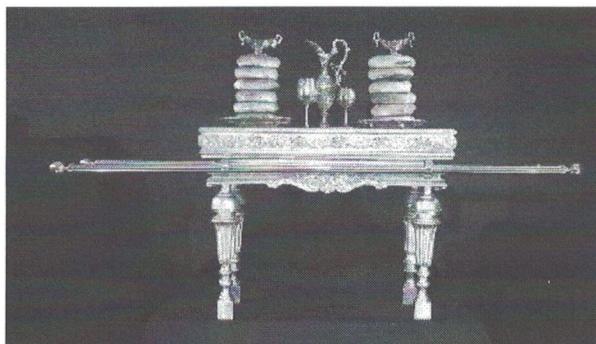


Figure 105 - Table of Shewbread

For the sake of completeness, although it is not mentioned in our ritual, the Table of Shewbread bore twelve loaves of bread, made of flour according to a recipe known to the Priests, and placed in two columns of six, surmounted by cups of frankincense. The Table was placed to the North of the Altar of Incense, while the Menorah was placed to its South. The bread was replaced weekly, and wine was poured over them, in a ceremony which reminds us of the offering of the

first High Priest mentioned in the Bible, Melchizedek, to Abram (Genesis 14:18), which will be well-known to those who have received the Order of High Priesthood, a prerequisite to being allowed to officiate as the High Priest of a Chapter, and which in New York State is performed once a year during the Annual Convocation of Grand Chapter.

The Altar of Incense is described in Exodus Chapter 30. It was a double cubical altar set immediately before the veil in front of the Holy of Holies, and incense was continually burned upon it. Like the Ark it was made of Shittim Wood, which is a species of Acacia, and as every Mason knows a symbol of immortality. Both were covered with a layer of gold, and both the Ark and Altar had rings set into them and two gold-covered staves, presumably to carry them in processions, not unlike the God Thrones of ancient Egypt, on which they were probably modeled, since the Israelites had lived in captivity in Egypt for many years and would have logically drawn much of their religious symbolism from that country's practices and customs.

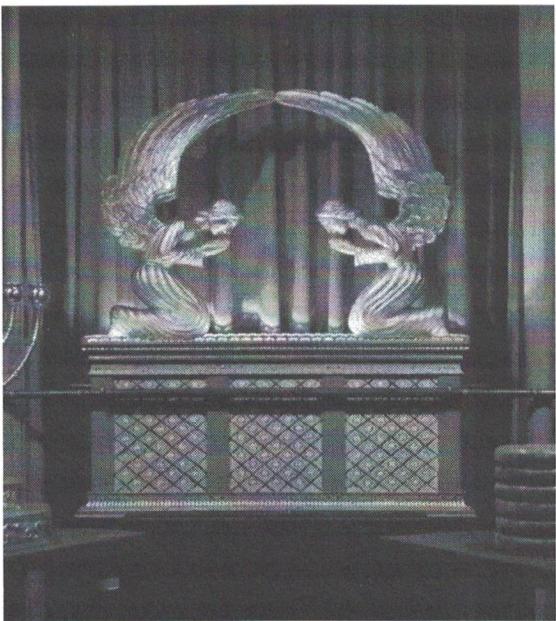


Figure 106 - Altar of Incense: note the rings and staves similar to the Ark of the Covenant

The Ark of the Covenant we saw for the first time in the Most Excellent Master Degree, when it was 'safely seated' in the Holy of Holies during that ceremony.

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*Figure 107 - Realization of the Ark of the Covenant at the Washington Masonic Memorial, Alexandria, VA*

The presence of the Ark of the Covenant in the Royal Arch ritual is largely Masonic license, since there is no reference to it in the Bible after the sack and destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar. It is also not featured upon Trajan's column in Rome, which commemorates the sack of the Temple in C.E. 66, in which only the Menorah is pictured. There is a telling story in the Talmud, the authoritative body of Jewish tradition, of a priest finding a loose stone on the Temple Mount and, realizing it is where the Ark was hidden, runs to tell his colleagues, but dies on the way. The moral is, that the Ark is not yet meant to be found. This common tradition of something remaining lost until it is meant to be found can also be seen in the legend of King Arthur, and, of course, the Lost Word.

However, despite the debate over whether it featured in the Second Temple built by Zerubbabel, its importance as a Masonic symbol is profound, since it is the vehicle by which the True Word is recovered: it bears the Word upon its exterior, while within is found a cipher through which is learned how to pronounce that Word.

The form of the Ark is also different to that used in the Most Excellent Master Degree. While the one used in that ceremony is closer to the precise descriptions in Exodus, including the Mercy Seat and the two Cherubim, the one used in the Holy Royal Arch Degree omits the Mercy Seat and Cherubim; perhaps to make the story of finding the characters upon it and removing the lid to discover its contents simpler to follow.

While the High Priest traditionally wears the breastplate at all meetings of the Chapter, the Ark of the Covenant, Menorah and Altar of Incense are normally only used during the Royal Arch Degree Ceremony itself.

In the ritual it is assumed that the Menorah and Altar of Incense were brought back to Jerusalem from Babylon by the exiles as part of the furnishings of the Temple handed over by King Darius; while the Ark of the Covenant was found beneath the ruins of the Temple during the ceremony, to realize the words of the Master Mason Degree: "until the wisdom of future generations discovers and brings to light the True Word."

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## The Prophecy

As the Candidates come before the High Council, the High Priest reads from Haggai 2:1 – 9, 23.

This is a bridge passage, which recalls how Zerubbabel the Prince and Jeshua the High Priest were inspired to lead the remnants of the exiled Israelites back to Jerusalem to rebuild the city and Temple. It recalls God's Covenant with his people when He led them out of exile in Egypt, and now reflected in the journey out of exile in Babylon. It is interesting to note that, in the passage, we are told that God said: "The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former." However, we also read in Ezra 3:12 – 13 that: "many of the priests and Levites and chief of the fathers, who were ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice; and many shouted aloud for joy: So that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people: for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the noise was heard afar off." In other words, those who were too young to remember the glory of the first temple shouted for joy, but those who remembered King Solomon's Temple wept when they saw the Second Temple being erected by Zerubbabel and Jeshua.

In our ritual the Scribe is Haggai. In the Bible, however, he is called a Prophet; and in the English ritual the three members of the High Council are Zerubbabel the King, Jeshua the Priest and Haggai the Prophet. The English ritual also had two scribes – Ezra and Nehemiah, which reflects the fact that they both wrote about the second temple, notwithstanding the fact that they were by no means contemporaries!

## The Task & the Sojourners

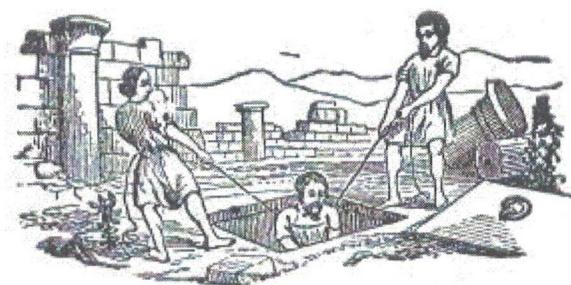


Figure 108 - Lowered into the vault

In many versions of the Holy Royal Arch Ritual the three Candidates are referred to as Sojourners. The term 'sojourner' means someone who is a traveler, but is staying temporarily in one place. Thus, the Candidates, who have traveled from Babylon to Jerusalem are now invited to rest awhile, and assist in the work being undertaken. They are told that the only work remaining is menial, and involves clearing away the rubbish in order to lay the new foundations for the Second

Temple. Symbolically, this indicates that, although they have just proven themselves to be Most Excellent Masters, or the most sophisticated and accomplished Masons, they are told they must undertake the type of work normally given to Entered Apprentices. However, they willingly accept

# CAPITULAR DEVELOPMENT COURSE

the task in hand, for they have been taught that “he that humbleth himself shall be exalted”: and we know that in a little while these humble sojourners will indeed be Exalted (the Ceremony of the Holy Royal Arch is sometimes called ‘Exaltation’) to become the Masters of the Veils.

The task itself, clearing away rubbish in order to lay the new foundation, is of course symbolic. In several continental versions of this degree, including the Scottish Rectified Rite and the Rite of Strict Observance, the Latin motto associated with this degree is ‘*Adhuc stat*’, meaning “It still stands”. This is accompanied by a Tracing Board depicting the fallen Temple, but with the pavement and the bases of the two columns still standing. Here we can see the fallen Temple as a version of Hiram Abif. The man was destroyed, but the Inner Man, that part which makes him immortal could not be destroyed. Similarly, the physical Temple may lie in ruins, but that essential part, the immortal soul of the Temple, still exists, and this is why the ceremony has the Sojourners enter the very heart of the edifice in order to discover the great secret, that eternal part of the Temple which man alone cannot destroy.

Again, if the Temple is a symbol for our own bodies, now dead and corrupt, what is this rubbish which we are clearing away? It is the accretion of bad behavior, dissipation, sinfulness, pride, envy, indeed all those attributes which we have been working to chip away in order to reveal the perfect ashlar within. Now we clear away these ‘extraneous knobs and excrescences.’ And what do we find? The Ark within! At last we understand: Truth lies within. It is not some distant external goal. It was been within us all the time, but we failed to recognize it.

## The Working Tools

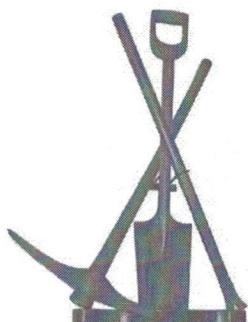


Figure 110 - Sojourners' tools

The tools the Sojourners are given are the crow(bar), pickaxe and the spade. We are told that the crowbar is used to lift objects of great weight – in this case the capstone of the vault. The pickaxe is used to loosen the soil and the spade is used to dig up and cast aside the rubbish.

We are also told that these refer to lifting prejudice and passion from our minds, loosening the hold of sin and folly, or vice and ignorance, and preparing the ground upon which to build the spiritual and moral life of his Second Temple.

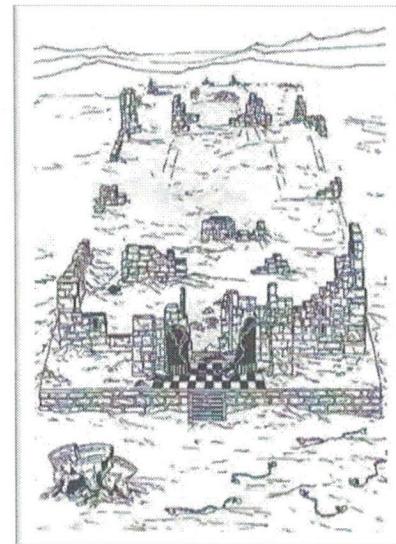


Figure 109 - The foundations of the First Temple still stand

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In the English ritual their description is rather more evocative:

"The stroke of the pick reminds us of the Last Trump, when the grave shall be shaken and loosened and give up its dead; the crow, being an emblem of uprightness, points out the erect manner in which we shall arise on that awful day to meet our tremendous though merciful Judge; while the manner in which the body is laid in the grave is depicted by the work of the shovel."

It is perhaps interesting to note that in the Popular National Songster, a collection of patriotic and other songs written in the early 1800s, one song, called *Patriotic Diggers*, which was meant to evoke a sense of class equality:

*Johnny Bull beware, keep at a proper distance,  
Else we'll make you stare at our firm resistance,  
Let alone the lads who are freedom tasting,  
Recollect our dads gave you once a basting.*

*Chorus:*

*Pick-axe, shovel, spade, crow-bar, hoe and barrow,  
Better not invade, Yankees have the marrow.*

*To protect our rights, 'gainst your flints and triggers,  
See on yonder heights our patriotic diggers,  
Men of every age, colour, rank, profession,  
Ardently engag'd, labour in succession.*

*Chorus:*

*Pick-axe, shovel, spade, crow-bar, etc...*

...

*Here the Mason builds freedom's shrine of glory,  
While the Painter gilds the immortal story;  
Blacksmiths catch the flame, Grocers feel the spirit,  
Printers share the fame and record their merit.*

*Chorus:*

*Pick-axe, shovel, spade, crow-bar, etc...*

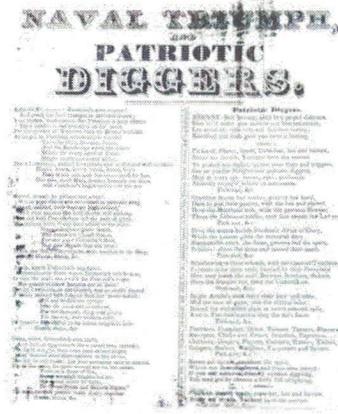


Figure 111 - Popular early 19th Century song

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It is difficult not to be struck by what appear to be clear references to Masonry hidden in this song. Firstly there is the overt claim that Masons were responsible for freedom and the war against *John Bull*, or the English. Though other trades are listed, their function is rather to extol and preserve

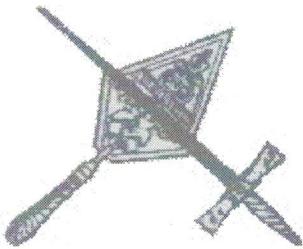


Figure 112 - The sword and trowel

the tale of the Masons' efforts. It is also interesting to note that the Chorus lists the pick-axe, spade (shovel is but a variation) and crowbar. It also says: "Yankees have the marrow". While this may be a stretch, it would seem to be a close hint at possession of a secret. In *The Origins of Freemasonry: Scotland's Century, 1590 – 1710*, by David Stevenson, he says (page 149): "The form *marrow bone* was also influential in the eighteenth century, and was incorporated with the Hiramic Legend: the secret taken from the corpse was a bone, with the marrow or secret in it."

Traditionally there are two other tools which were used by the builders of the Second Temple. While not overtly mentioned in the Preston Webb Royal Arch Ritual, they are commonly found in almost all other variants of the Royal Arch theme, and are even mentioned in the Cryptic Degrees, which once say alongside the Capitular Degrees. These are the sword and trowel, and are taken from Nehemiah 4:14, which says: "The laborers who carried the loads worked with one hand and held a weapon with the other." So the workmen carried a trowel with which they rebuilt the Temple, and a sword in the other hand, with which they defended themselves from their enemies who sought to prevent them from finishing.

Symbolically the sword and the trowel also represent the Tree of Life, reflected in the two columns of King Solomon's Temple. The sword represents the Pillar of Severity, while the trowel indicates the Pillar of Mercy. Recall its introduction as a Working Tool of the Third Degree, when we are told it is used for: "spreading the cement of brotherly love and affection, that cement which unites us into one sacred band of friends and Brothers."

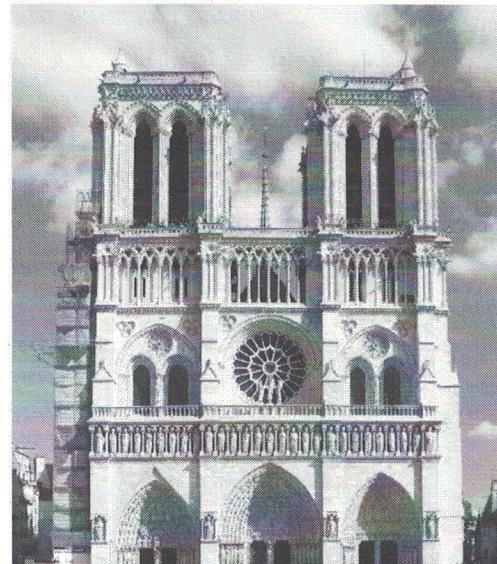


Figure 113 - Remember that the two towers in front of cathedrals (here Notre Dame in Paris) reproduce Boaz and Jachin, or the pylons before the Egyptian Temples...

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## The Inventions or Discoveries

We learn, not surprisingly, that there are three discoveries. The first is the Keystone, the second the three Squares, and the third the Ark of the Covenant. Each discovery links it to one of the preceding Capitular Degrees.

Firstly the Keystone is found, which was discovered among the rubbish in the Mark Degree, and it once more discovered among the rubbish in this Degree.

Secondly the three Squares are discovered, which reminds us of the Virtual Past Master Degree, since the Square jewel is the insignia of Mastership.

Finally, Ark of the Covenant is found; and as we learned in Hiram King of Tyre's, speech in the Most Excellent Master Degree: "although the structure has been finished, the Temple is not complete, for it cannot be the House of God until the Ark of the Covenant has been placed therein."

For Masons, while the discovery of the Ark is of great importance, it is almost incidental in our story to the most important discovery of all: the True Word.

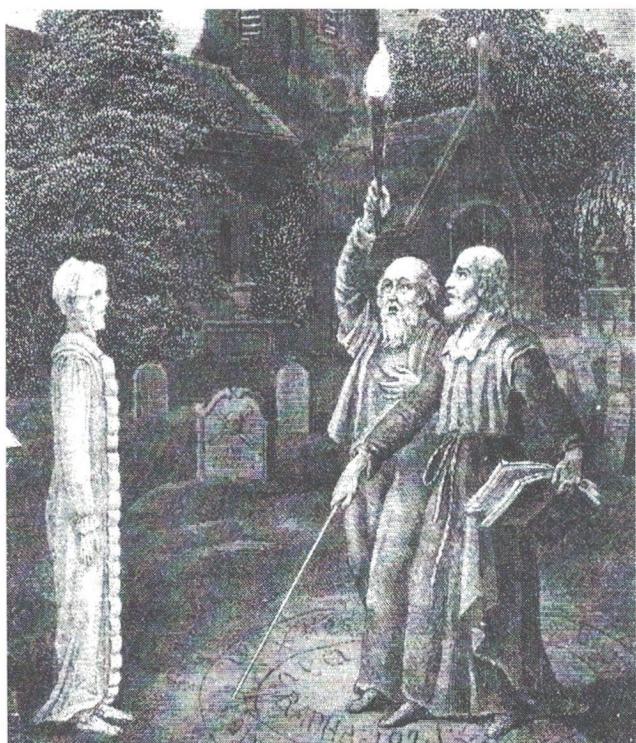


Figure 114 - Edward Kelley, John Dee's assistant, reanimating a corpse

The True Word is written within the very heart of the Temple. In the Mark Degree we hear Revelations 2:17 quoted: "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it."

We learn that, just as man has his true name written within, so does the Temple, and by finding and saying this word the Temple – like man – may be brought back to spiritual life.

The power of a name has been taught across the centuries. In magical lore, it was taught that, in order to control a person, angel or even demon one needed to know its true name. This is why, in the Rite of Exorcism, one of the priest's main tasks is to get the inimical spirit possessing the victim to divulge its true name. Once the priest has this he can go about the task

## CAPITULAR DEVELOPMENT COURSE

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of expelling it from the person it is occupying. Vodoun has a similar ritual for controlling another person through knowing his or her name. Even seemingly harmless Victorian love spells involved writing the name of the object of desire upon a piece of parchment and performing some innocent spells over it, then either wearing the paper in a locket or burying it in a place the desired one would walk over. Angels, demons, sprites, elementals, even gods have been summoned through the ages by evocation, which meant using their name. Even our fairy stories and nursery rhymes reflect this action: think of Rumpelstiltskin, or the Wicked Witch's mirror in *Sleeping Beauty* to cite just two examples.

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that in this story the name which will reestablish the Temple is found at the very heart of the ruins, and that uttering it will bring the whole edifice back to life.

### The Substitute Ark and the Substitute Word

As an aside, it is worth noting that the Ritual is careful to note that the Ark of the Covenant is a *copy*, and the contents *imitations* of the pot of manna, Aaron's rod and the book of the Law. This problem is neatly sidestepped in other Royal Arch rituals. For example, in England, it is the word which is found on a double cubical altar, and not the Ark. Similarly, in some European rituals, the focus is upon rekindling the sacred fire to represent the return of God/life to the Temple/Man.

The passing mention that these are replicas themselves is completely incidental to the story, and is only included to provide continuity with the story of the Cryptic Degrees, which are a part of the York Rite family in the United States and some other countries. The point of the story is that of the discovery of a great secret within the vault of the old Temple, by means of which the True Word is rediscovered, and the 'wisdom of former generations' restored.

The symbols found within the Ark are taken directly from the description of the contents in the Holy Bible, and are reflected in the Capitular Degrees. The manna is referred to in the passage describing the white stone upon which a name is written. The rod reflects that carried by the Principal Sojourner as a staff of office, that of Moses which became a snake before the Children of Israel and before the pharaoh's Priests; and that of Aaron when it budded to indicate that he had been selected as the High Priest. Finally, the Book of the Law reflects the belief that Ezra reintroduced the Pentateuch, or Torah in Jerusalem, upon the return of the exiles. This contained the books ascribed to Moses, being Genesis, Deuteronomy, Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers. We can also note that the Book of the Law represents the Scribe, the Pot of Manna the King (he who feeds and provides for his people), and Aaron's Rod the High Priest.

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Finally, by means of the Ark and the key found within, the Substitute Word is abrogated, and the True Word rediscovered and conferred upon the Candidates. Henceforth they are Companions, in possession of that which was lost.

And they are finally taught the reason why Hiram Abif couldn't communicate the Master's Word to the ruffians. It was not stubbornness which prevented him. Of course there was bravery, but more than anything it was the physical impossibility of transmitting the word as it requires three people in the proper position in order to communicate the True Word. Once he was dead, King Solomon and Hiram King of Tyre could no longer utter the word themselves since, according to Masonic tradition, it could only be uttered by the High Priest in the Holy of Holies but once a year, or by three Master Masons each uttering but a single syllable of that word.

## The Masonic Alphabet

The Masonic code or Pigpen code, as it is also known, despite the admonition in the ritual to destroy it after explaining how the words on the Ark are derived, can hardly be said to be secret any longer. It is found in Dan Brown's 2009 novel *The Lost Symbol*, and even in children's books as an easy substitution code. A simple search on the internet will reveal not only the code laid out for all to see, but even fonts which you can download and use on your computer!

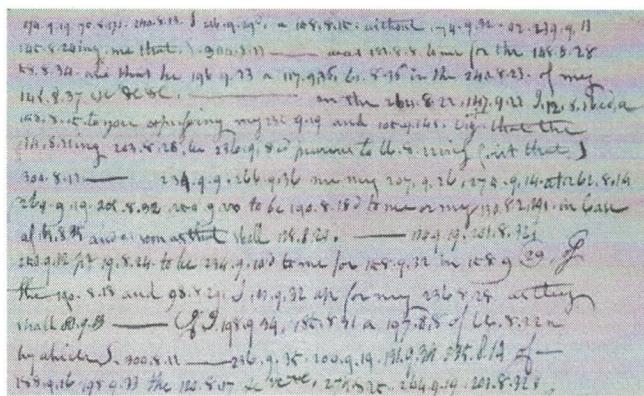


Figure 115 - Part of Benedict Arnold's coded letter to John André

However, there is evidence that this cipher played a much more serious role in the late 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> Century. There is evidence that George Washington's army used the system, but with the letter of the alphabet more randomly associated with the signs, and it was also used during the Civil War by union prisoners in Confederate jails. We may see it on many Masonic gravestones of that period, too. And there is evidence it was used in communications between Masons which they wished to keep private.

## The Discovery of the True Mason's Word

The actual word itself works particularly well in the context of the ritual. As we just learned, since the Word could only be uttered completely by the High Priest once a year in the Tabernacle, and later in the Temple, the only other people who could utter it were King Solomon, Hiram King of Tyre, and Hiram Abif with a 'tribble voice'. When Hiram Abif was slain the ability to pronounce

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the Word was lost, and it was lost a second time – this time to the Children of Israel – when Judah was overrun by Nebuzaradan, Captain of the Guard to Nebuchadnezzar.

While Masonic lore is unclear on the matter, it is assumed that, since the High Priest could only teach his successor the Great and Sacred Name of God, this avenue of restoring the Lost Word was forever closed to King Solomon and Hiram, King of Tyre.



Figure 116 - The Kingdoms of Israel and Judah

We should remember that Israel only remained united as a people for a very short time. When King Solomon's son, Rehoboam, came to the throne, the people of Israel begged him to lighten the taxes which King Solomon had put on them to pay for the Temple and his palace. But Rehoboam received bad advice from his young friends, and ignoring the counsel of the elders, uttered the famous line: "My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add thereto: my father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions." (2 Chronicles 10:14). So the majority of the people separated themselves, and two countries were established: Judah in the Southern part, which included Jerusalem, and was composed of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin; and Israel, to the North, which was composed of the other ten tribes.

In Masonic lore the Word was lost to us when Hiram Abif was killed; and in the Bible it was lost to the people of Judah when the Temple was razed to the ground.

It is interesting to note that, while the means of discovery – called the Grand Royal Arch Word – is recited at every meeting of Royal Arch Masons, becoming in itself a kind of second substitute word, the Great and Sacred Name of God is only uttered when the Holy Royal Arch Degree is being conferred upon Candidates. Since most Chapters will probably only confer the Degree once a year, this holds true to the idea that the Great and Sacred Name should only be uttered but once a year in the Holy of Holies.

## Exaltation

It is interesting to see that the word *exaltation* has two meanings in England. Firstly, it is "the act of raising someone or something in importance." Secondly, it is "a strong sense of happiness, power, or importance." (both Merriam-Webster dictionary). [www.dictionary.com](http://www.dictionary.com) goes on to include "elation of mind or feeling; mystical exaltation."

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Both would seem to be highly appropriate, in that they reflect both an external and internal transformation.

Externally the Candidate is now called a Companion rather than a Brother. He is no longer a Sojourner, but a permanent resident of Jerusalem, with an important and prestigious role in guarding the High Council seated in the Tabernacle. He is now symbolically a Master of a Veil. Since three must be Exalted at one time, this means the three new Companions now become the Masters of the Blue, Purple and Red Veils, under the instruction of the Royal Arch Captain. The new Companion is now in possession of the True Word of Master Mason. His old white apron has been removed and a more glorious one, trimmed with red and bearing a potent sigil upon its flap, tied about his waist.

Internally, he is overjoyed with the discovery of the True Word, and his elation is matched by the knowledge that he has symbolically completed his Masonic journey, that he is now perfected, his Living Stone now forms part of the fabric of the Spiritual Temple, and within him he carries that Name which no man may know, save him to whom it is given. He has died and passed beyond the veil. He has seen God face to face, and knows His Name.

But in all this euphoria, we must remember an important fact. Initiation, by its very definition, means a beginning, it does not make one an Adept; it only provides permission or authority to study to become that person which he has symbolically represented in the ritual itself. The Companion has been given the tools, but if he lays them aside, believing that he is now a perfect man, he fools himself and submits himself to the tyrannical sin of pride or *hubris*. His new journey is now only beginning. He has passed through the veil and now his learning, his path begins anew. It is now for him to gird himself with his sword, take his trowel in hand, and continue on this magnificent journey of discovery.

### The Words

The words used to learn the pronunciation of the Great and Sacred Name, we are told, are “composed of the names of Deity in three languages, the Syriac, the Chaldean and the Egyptian.”



Figure 117 - In England and in its Jurisdictions the apron is more elaborate, and a sash is also worn

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Why are these three languages – or countries – selected?



Figure 118 - Chaldean inscription c. 500 BCE

Conveniently for Masonry, and its love of the number three, the Children of Israel are associated with three major journeys. The first was the journey out of Egyptian bondage and into the Promised Land. The second was the journey which led from Jerusalem into exile in Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar, of the Chaldean dynasty. Finally, the Children of Israel returned to Jerusalem empowered by the initial ruling of King Darius I, King of Persia, who adopted the Aramaic language of Syriac as the official language for all legal and political communication and documents across his empire.

It is interesting to note that all three of these tongues were associated with quasi-monotheistic religions. However, early Masonic scholarship was not what it is now, and so we find as few minor errors in what is otherwise a clever device: the rediscovery of how to pronounce the True Name of God by aid of the names of the ‘head’ Gods of the three countries in which the Children of Israel formerly sojourned.

We are told that ‘Jah’ is the name of the Syriac god. In fact this is unlikely, since Darius and Cyrus were almost certainly Zoroastrians. Apart from a healthy respect for the Judaic god, who among other names, was called ‘Jah’, the uncreated father-god of the Zoroastrians was Ahuramazda.

We are on firmer ground with the Chaldean *Bel*. This is another name for Marduk, who was the god of the Babylonian region and considered the leader of the gods.

Unfortunately with the Egyptian God we are back on shaky ground. We must remember that the translation of the Rosetta Stone – which provided a passage in hieroglyphs, demotic Egyptian and Greek, enabling hieroglyphic inscriptions to be translated – did not take place until 1822, and the first English translation not until 1854. Prior to that time ancient Egyptian history was largely guesswork and fantasy.



Figure 119 - Marduk, or Bel

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In Genesis 41:45 we read that, in recognition of interpreting the pharaoh's dream, Joseph is given Asenath, the daughter of Potiphar (sometimes rendered Potipherah), priest of *On*. It is highly likely that this is where the idea that *On* was a great god in Egypt arose. Initially – and incorrectly – *On* was thought to be an old name for Osiris. However, later scholarship revealed that *On* was in fact a place, not the name of a god! The true father of the Egyptian gods was Ra.

One thing in common between the gods is that they are all sun gods – associated with the sun. This recalls the position the sojourner's hand involuntarily took in order to protect his eyes when recovering the Ark.

## The Number Three

We have seen a number of instances of the number three in this Degree, which continues the litany of threes in the Blue Lodge Degrees. Indeed, the list at the end of the Historical Lecture may be read with profit.

However, there is a particular application of the number three which is prominent in this Degree, yet not explicitly mentioned in that list. At the Opening of the Chapter, the High Priest asks the Captain of the Host: "How shall I know you to be a Royal Arch Mason". The response is: "By three times three."

Now, we know there are three times three, or three groups of three Officers – the High Council, the three subordinate Officers (Captain of the Host, Principal Sojourner, Royal Arch Captain) and three Masters of the Veils. There are three times three passwords to pass through the Veils, and we put our right feet, left and right arms in a three times three position in order to communicate the Word.

However, there is a subtler force at work. Three times three can also be expressed as three squared, or  $3^2$ . If the regular symbolism of the Blue Lodge is the repetition of the number three, we now see this squared to nine. We can say mathematically that the number three is now functioning at a higher power. This is another indication that this Degree is suggestive of a higher level, or plane: as we have seen before, in the Royal Arch we have moved from the terrestrial, earthly plane to the spiritual plane.

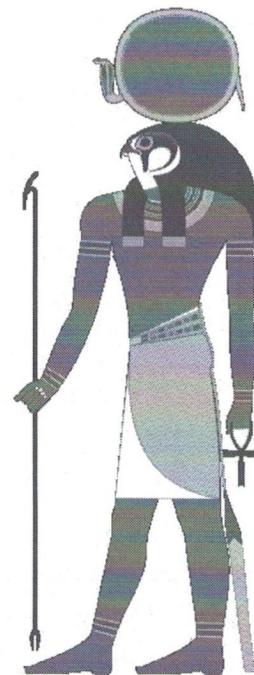


Figure 120 – Ra or Re, the Sun god of the Egyptians

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## The Triple Tau

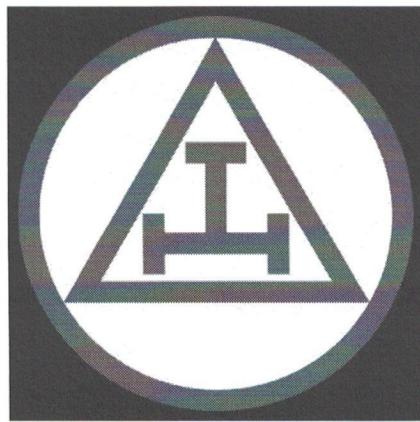


Figure 121 - The Royal Arch Emblem

Surely there can be no more fascinating and mysterious symbol than the emblem of this Grade: the Triple Tau, contained within a triangle within a circle. We are told that this device is "the emblem of emblems of a Royal Arch Mason, typifying the Sacred Name, the Author of Eternal Life."

This is a somewhat terse description of so profound a symbol.

In the English Ritual we are taught in the Mystical Lecture that: "The triangle has long been considered a sacred symbol. In times of antiquity names of God and symbols of the Deity were often enclosed in triangular figures. The Circle, having neither beginning nor ending, is an emblem of eternity, and may justly be deemed a symbol of God, without beginning of days or ending of years..."

However, on the subject of the Triple Tau it is less helpful:

"The Tau is that mark or character spoken of by the angel whom Ezekiel saw in the spirit, when it was said to the man with the writer's inkhorn: 'go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof'; by which mark they were saved from among those who were slain for their idolatry by the wrathful displeasure of the Most High.

"The Tau was in ancient times set up those who were acquitted by their judges, as a proof of their innocence, and military commanders caused it to be placed on those who returned from battle unhurt from the field of battle, to show that they were in perfect life. It has, therefore, even been considered a mark or sign of life. The union of the three Taus alludes

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to the Deity, by whom the gloom, horrific, and unshapen chaos was changed into regular form and peaceful existence."

Very poetic, but it still doesn't tell us why we would wear this mark upon our apron!

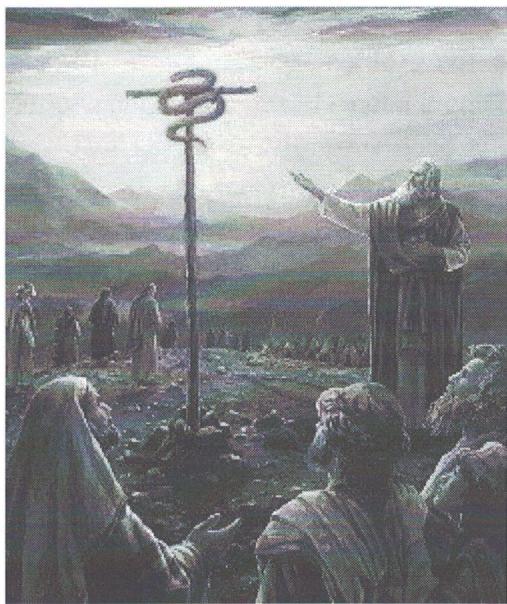


Figure 122 - Nehushtan, the Brazen Serpent

The tau is both the 19<sup>th</sup> letter of the Greek alphabet, and also the 22<sup>nd</sup> letter of the Hebrew alphabet. In this context the Hebrew *tau* or *tav* is more pertinent. The 22<sup>nd</sup> Path of the Tree of Life links Malkuth, or Earth, to Yesod, or the Astral, and to attain that level you must pass through a veil. Another name for Yesod is Foundation, and this is what is being restored and rebuilt in the story of the Royal Arch Degree. It is also considered to represent a cross – not the Christian one with four arms, but the T-shaped cross Moses erected in the desert bearing the Brazen Serpent Nehushtan (Numbers 21:9).

Being the last letter in the Hebrew alphabet it also signifies ending, or a new beginning. Three Taus represent this emphatically. It is the symbol of the

absolute, of the perfection of creation; and since it bears the highest value of any Hebrew letter, 400, it also stands for infinity.

In the form of the Greek *tau*, which may have been the original shape of the Hebrew tau, or the cross carried by Moses, in the passage from Ezekiel (9:4) mentioned above, it is a sign of absolution from sin, which is a similar purpose to the snake upon the cross of Moses, since many commentaries identify the snakes which plagued the Children with Israel with sin, and gazing upon the brazen serpent on the cross as an act of contrition, and therefore absolution., symbolized by the comment that those who gazed upon it did not die. Naturally, in Christian commentaries, that later led to this scene in the desert being seen as a harbinger of Jesus hanging upon the cross, bearing the weight of mankind's sins, and that those who gazed upon the cross – that is, turn to Christianity – would have everlasting life. However, we should also remember that the introduction of the cross as a symbol of Christianity was relatively late, not coming into common imagery until the 4<sup>th</sup> Century C.E. Prior to that it was more common to use the symbol of a fish, or the Chi-Rho symbol, since the cross was an awkward reminder of the ignominious death, reserved to slaves and traitors, which the Nazarene had suffered.

Esoterically the letter *tau* represents a gateway or opening (since its later appearance looked like two doorposts with a lintel across them), or a symbolic death leading to a new life; an initiation

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including a symbolic death, such as was practiced in many of the ancient mystery cults – and Freemasonry! In this sense the link between gateway and cross become obvious, since *tav* is the last letter of the alphabet, signifying the end, but a new beginning. A doorway symbolizes moving into a new place. And the cross symbolizes death to a new life, be it the painful torture or gazing upon a brazen serpent as a promise to live like a new man.



Figure 123 - Celestial Jerusalem descending from heaven

Some see the emblem of the Triple Tau as actually being a letter ‘T’ standing upon a letter ‘H’. This is been severally identified with the phrase ‘Templum Hieroslyma’, Latin for the Temple of Jerusalem; and even the initials of Thoth, the great Egyptian teacher, who was meant to have brought the knowledge of the gods to mankind; and who was also believed to be Hermes Trismegistus, the legendary sage. In the Mark Master Degree we learned that the device written upon the Keystone began with the letters ‘HT’ indicating Hiram (the) Tyrian.

Perhaps the most important lesson to learn is that the Masonic sign par excellence, the point within a circle, is now expanded in form and meaning. We are taught here that the Brother is the point and the circle Deity, and also the

boundary of his duty to God and man. In this system man was at the center. Now in the Triple Tau God is at the center, and we contemplate Him, not as an external power, as we did in the earlier Degrees, but now as a part of us, within us, ruling and guiding our actions.

This God within, bears three essential attributes, as we are told in the Historical Lecture, like the triangle, to represent the three essential attributes of God, namely Omnipresence, Omniscience, and Omnipotence.

### The Symbol of the Holy Royal Arch

The Arch itself is a very profound symbol indeed. It has many interpretations, but perhaps the clearest one may be considered here.

We understand that the arch completes the edifice, and also the roof to be placed over the building to cover the inner space. It was in understanding the nature of arches that the Egyptians, then the

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Israelites and all nations of the Middle East, the Greeks, the Romans, and the Masons of the Gothic era and later were able to build ever taller structures with larger and larger protected interiors. So the columns raise the walls, the arch holds the ceiling in place, but the keystone binds the whole together.

The inspiration for this architectural structure, as we have seen, probably came from a close observation of the Book of Nature, and columns closely resemble the tree trunks which are still used in more primitive tribes as the verticals which form the framework of the walls, while the idea of the vaulted ceiling probably came from an observation of the way the higher branches became interwoven in forest canopies.

For us, we recognize the columns of Boaz and Jachin as representing the terrestrial and celestial worlds. Indeed in our Lodge Rooms 'B' bears a terrestrial globe, while 'J' bears a representation of the heavens or celestial realm.

What was once one in God became divided into two. This theme of division may be seen everywhere: male and female, day and night, good and bad, rich and poor, summer and winter. Everywhere in Nature we see two contending forces. Our entire Masonic journey has been spent trying to find how to reconcile these two forces.

Perhaps the most perfect and simple image of two contrary forces being reconciled is the triangle, or delta. It teaches us that a third side, or force, is required to balance the other two and make them harmonious and whole. This is perhaps why the delta has for so long been both a symbol of deity, and an indication of a reconciliation of three forces which comprise God. Most theologies contain some form of Trinity, from Isis, Osiris and Horus; and Shiva, Vishnu, and Brahma; right down to Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Another is the arch.

If Boaz represents the Earth and Jachin the Heavens, then what does the Ark which unites them represent? It is the Ark of the Covenant, the arch of the rainbow, that which united God and Man. Since we have become separated through man's pride and his fall, then we can work to rebuild the path, the Jacob's Ladder which used to unite us. In the arch we reconcile heaven and earth, and open the path of communication between them once more.

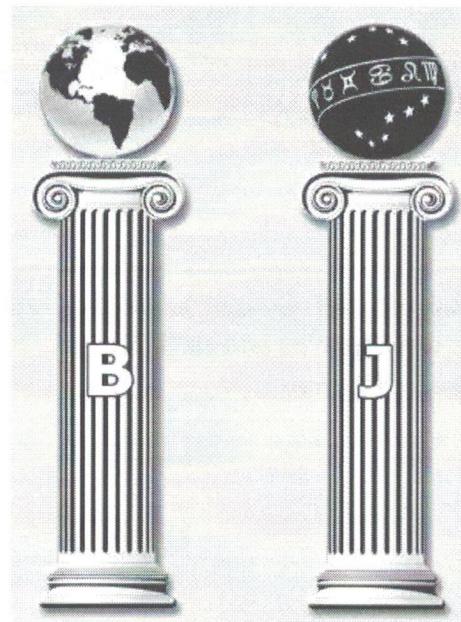


Figure 124 - The terrestrial and celestial pillars

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The Keystone which holds the bond between heaven and earth conjoined and co-dependent is the very stone with the builders rejected. With it we bridge the gap, and all of us become a pontifex, or bridge-builder. This is the fifth or final Alliance which will be everlasting.

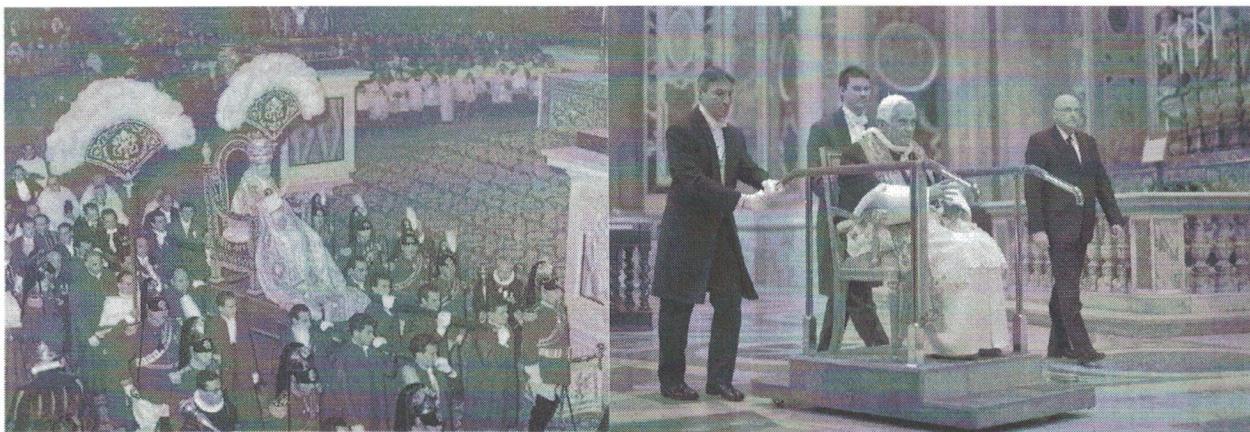


Figure 125 - The Roman Catholic Pontifex - then and now

And one last thought to ponder. Upon the surface of that White Stone which holds the bridge between heaven and earth in place, is a name composed of eight letters, as we learned in the Mark Master Degree.

**H :: T :: W :: S :: S :: T :: K :: S**

The number eight is considered the number of perfection in many esoteric systems. For example, in Nicomachus' Arithmetic, it is equated with universal harmony. It is also the third number of the celestial triad in the Qabalistic Tree of life (Kether being '10' and Binah '9'), and therefore represents the Eternal Son, or again Perfected Man who finally aspires to join with God. And Man is perfected through Truth, or *emet*...

And finally we learn why this degree is called the Holy Royal Arch, when the Arch appears to feature so little in the story. For this is a story of recovering the Lost Word, of discovering Truth within ourselves once more. And armed with self-knowledge and knowing the True Name of the Great and Ever-Living God, we may dare to cross the bridge which separates us from Him.

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## The Charge

The Charge reminds us of our duties as Royal Arch Masons and Companions. It gives us three admonitions.

Firstly, that we are to study those lessons we have just received, and which should have profoundly impressed us. We should have realized that we are entering a completely different level of understanding of the lessons of Masonry, and have begun to realize there are indeed important secrets in Freemasonry which remain hidden to those who are not prepared to take the time to study and understand them.

Secondly, we are given an indication of the way we can accomplish this difficult goal. We are told to ‘contemplate’ the Sacred Source, and to ‘realize more and more the ever presence of the Great I Am’. This is a progressive study, borne of contemplation or meditation. It is not enough to sit and read: one must allow the teachings to infiltrate us, to move us, to become one with us, until we intuitively begin to understand the messages within the Degree which have only been touched in this course.

And thirdly, we are told to guard the Outer Door more carefully than ever. We are not to cast pearls before swine. These Mysteries – and the Charge openly uses the word ‘Mysteries’ are only to be unveiled to those who have the capacity to learn from them. The outer courts of the Blue Lodge have their foundations in the earthly world. The Royal Arch established its foundations in the spiritual world. We have symbolically died, with Hiram, in order to pass to this Second Temple, and, like him, we have endured that Long Night of the Soul and merited coming before the Throne. And now we must keep the Veils between the two systems firmly drawn, and only part them when we find a person who is worthy to join this honorable Order of Companions.

## Biblical References

As in the previous Degrees, the system of Capitular Degrees draws very heavily for both the Old and the New Testament. Although the stories told in the ritual are from the Old Testament, many lessons drawn come from the Gospels. This should not be very surprising. Firstly, these rituals came from countries which were heavily steeped in the Christian tradition. Secondly, these Degrees concern themselves with the fulfilment of promises made by God, and the perfection of Man who may now rise above his sinful nature and reunite with God. These are surely themes found in abundance in the New Testament.

Yet in the 18<sup>th</sup> Degree of the Ancient Accepted Scottish Rite, when we are told that the story of Jesus is used to teach the Law of Love, we are also reminded that people of all religions should

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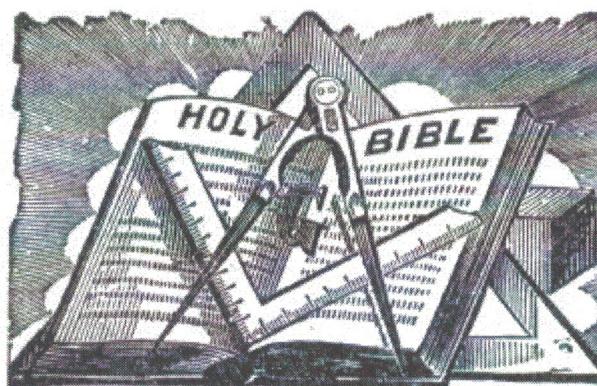
not fail to see the message in this story and apply it to their own paths. Similarly, this is a story of man perfecting himself.

In this it uses the references to Jesus in an almost gnostic sense: that we all contain a spark of the divine, and that however, immersed in mud and slime we become, and take on an earthly body, as Adam did when he turned from God, that spark lives on, immortal and undiminished. If we take the trouble to recognize our potential, and work upon ourselves, making us fit receptacles of that immortal fire, or spiritual temples not made with hands, as our ritual says, then we may once more shed our earthly body and find ourselves once more clothed in that glorious body which was our First Estate, and commune once more with the God from whom we came, the Great Architect of the Universe who made us and who by that act of creation became forever our Father in Heaven.

You will find that throughout this course all biblical quotations or citations have been followed by the relevant chapter or verse in the Volume of Sacred Law. For ease of reference the name of the book has always been written in full, followed by the number of the chapter, and verse. For example, Ezekiel 2:22 – 24 would mean the Book of Ezekiel, Chapter 2 Verses 22 to 24.

If you are familiar with the Bible and are a regular reader, we hope this course have given you food for thought. If you are less familiar with the Holy Book, we would remind you of the Worshipful Master's admonition right after your Obligation as Entered Apprentice: "Freemasonry, therefore, opens this book upon its Altars, with the command to each of its votaries that he diligently study therein to learn the way to everlasting life."

Now you understand why these words are both so important, and how they were, even then, a harbinger of the journey which would lead to this Degree. You have symbolically died and been raised, set aside all substitutes and been entrusted with the Truth, the True Word. You have the tools, and we have explained them as much as we are permitted. The rest of the journey is up to you!



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## HRA Discussion Questions

- 1 We have seen that the number '7' has a strong connection with the Holy Royal Arch Degree. List the number of instances of the number '7' being used in the Degree, in the ritual, in its symbols and by implication. Why is the number '7' so important in the Royal Arch, and what does it teach us?
- 2 Consider the Seven Liberal Arts and Sciences covered in the Middle Chamber Lecture. They are: Grammar, Rhetoric, Logic, Arithmetic, Geometry, Astronomy and Music. How are these used in the Royal Arch Degree? Can you detect their presence and their influence? Identify parts of the ritual which exemplify each Art and Science.
- 3 The four veils have been seen as symbols for a great number of concepts, ranging from the four elements to the four faces of the Merkabah of Ezekiel and Revelations. Review those allegories and interpretations mentioned in this course, and critique them. What do you think of them? Can you think of any others?
- 4 We learned that there were a number of possible antecedents to the Royal Arch Degree, including the story of Noah's Ark, which still features in the Royal Ark Mariner Degrees of the Allied Masonic Degrees; and the pseudepigraphical Book of Enoch, which contained both references to nine subterranean vaults concealing a white porphyry stone bearing the ineffable name of Deity, and the two columns of marble and brick bearing the wisdom of humanity to withstand conflagration or inundation. Think of another story in the Bible which would lend itself to a Masonic Degree. How would you stage it, and what lesson would it transmit?
- 5 Do you think there is any credibility in the theory that the Royal Arch Degree was originally part of the Installation Ceremony, and that its symbolism was removed for political reasons? What do *you* think the origins of the Royal Arch Degree were?