



Provincial Grand Chapter of Cumberland & Westmorland

Masonic Hall, Station Road, Kendal, Cumbria LA9 6BT

The Temple of Zerubbabel

It has to be appreciated that there is a gap of several hundred years between the buildings of the first Temple by King Solomon, as portrayed in the 3 Degrees of Craft, its destruction and its eventual replacement under Zerubbabel, as is dramatised in the Royal Arch exaltation ceremony. In such time the area was occupied and re-occupied (as it still is to this day) by a number of neighbouring warring nations.

It is recorded that the existence of the magnificent and costly Temple built and furnished by King Solomon was fairly short-lived. Solomon was surrounded by many pagan peoples, and even the Hebrews themselves tended from time to time to fall into idolatry. After Solomon's death, ten tribes under the leadership of Jeroboam broke away to form the independent kingdom of Israel and made the city of Samaria its capital. The tribes of Judah and Benjamin remained faithful to the line of David and held onto the mountain stronghold of Jerusalem which overlooked the vital, important and lucrative trade-route between two warring countries - Syria and Egypt. For a period of four hundred years Palestine was ravaged from many different points. In the fifth year of Rehoboam's reign, Shishak, King of Egypt, plundered Jerusalem and its Temple and carried away all its gold furnishings.

In 722 B.C. the independent kingdom of Samaria became an Assyrian province and the ten tribes (the Samaritans) were taken into captivity. However, in Jerusalem Hezekiah secured peace by paying tribute to his conquerors and to some extent restored the Temple worship. Eighty years later Josiah repaired the Temple and refurnished it with gold vessels. It was at this time that Hilkiah found the 'Book of the Law' in the house of the Lord which forms the basis of the Irish Royal Arch Ritual. Theirs is one of repair as opposed to our re-building.

What appeared to be the end of Jerusalem and its magnificent Temple came in 586 B.C. when both were plundered by Nebuzaradan, Captain of the guard to Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon. The Temple treasures were stolen and the two faithful tribes of Judah and Benjamin were carried off to Babylon leaving only the peasants and others whose enforced duty was to till the land.

In Babylon the exiles lived in small colonies and, although they had no temples, they were able to form worshipping congregations which enabled them to keep their faith in their country and their God alive, as is told in emotional language recorded in Psalm 137 - *"By the rivers of Babylon we sat down, yea we wept when we remembered Zion etc"*.

However, the empire that Nebuchadnezzar had built had short shrift when the Medes and Persians came against it. About 70 years after the Jews had been taken into exile,



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Cyrus the Persian King, conquered Babylon and added it to his empire which covered a large part of West Asia for the next two centuries. A few months after reaching Babylon, Cyrus issued an edict allowing the Jewish exiles to return to Palestine and inviting the two faithful tribes to rebuild the city and its Temple. What his motives were in allowing them to return are unknown but he gave the two tribes his protection, supplied them with materials for the re-building and promised to restore the riches carried off by the Babylonians some seventy years before.

The invitation to return to their own native land was not, at first, warmly or widely accepted as most of the Jews had been born in exile and had never seen Palestine. However, a small group availed itself of the permission and made the journey back to Jerusalem under Sheshbazzar in 537 B.C. and started the work. Seventeen years later a much stronger group led by Zerubbabel returned but were mortified to find that they could only occupy the ruins and immediate vicinity of Jerusalem as tribes of mixed blood had moved into Judea during their years of exile.

Under Zerubbabel the Governor, Joshua the High Priest, and the Prophets Haggai and Zechariah the second Temple was built and dedicated to the worship of God in 516 B.C. Priests among the returned exiles regulated the ritual in the new Temple in accordance with the Book of the Law discovered by Hilkiah more than a century before. In the meantime Cyrus had been succeeded by Cambyses, who, influenced by the hostility of the tribes dwelling near Jerusalem, stopped the work, but he in turn was succeeded by Darius Hystaspes, who gave the Jews much-needed assistance, for all through the period they were harassed by neighbouring tribes (the Samaritans), in whom there was more than a tinge of Jewish blood. The Samaritans, appealing to Darius, tried again to hinder the work, which continued under the encouragement of Haggai the Prophet.

Darius permitted the stolen treasures to be returned to Jerusalem under armed escort and it is this difficult and dangerous journey which is thought by some writers to be symbolised by the ceremony formerly known as the 'Passing of the Veils'.

Haggai the Prophet deserves a great place in the narrative of the returned exiles. He had been born in Babylon, and is believed to have travelled to Judea with Zerubbabel and took over the task of exhorting his countrymen to finish rebuilding the Temple which had been at a standstill due to the hostilities of the surrounding tribes. He assured the Jews that "the glory of this latter house shall be greater than the former" – a difficult prophecy inasmuch as the Second Temple could not compare with the richness and splendour of the first one, but the prophecy was said to have been fulfilled when Christ entered it many years later.

As the years passed the Jewish Priests became careless and corrupt, neglected the Temple services. Fifty-eight years after its completion Ezra arrived in Jerusalem and immediately set about reforming and purifying the priesthood; fourteen years later Artaxerxes of Persia allowed Nehemiah his aristocratic Jewish courtier and cup-bearer to go to Jerusalem as its Governor. Under Nehemiah's direction the walls of the city were rebuilt despite continued attacks by the Samaritans. Their valour is



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recorded in the Book of Nehemiah iv, 17-18. It is from this text that the ritual records *“with trowel in hand and sword by their side.”*

However, the rebuilt Temple had a tragic history. It was plundered, desecrated and rededicated again in 165 B.C. by Judas Maccabeus, again profaned, plundered and pulled down to the very foundations by Herod the Great in order that he might rebuild it on a grander scale as a memorial to himself!

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