

# SYMBOLISM OF THE SECOND TEMPLE

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Let us take a moment to consider some of the symbolism in the York Rite, specifically the Second Temple and what this teaches to us as Royal Arch Masons and Companions of the Cryptic Council. As you know, our situation in Virginia and West Virginia is unique in that the Council is not a separate body, but the Degrees are given to Companions prior to receiving the Royal Arch Degree. This will be significant for this paper, since many references to the Second Temple come from the Council, rather than the Chapter. Interestingly, the Degrees are given somewhat out of order, so to understand the role of the Second Temple in its historical context, let us first put them into their proper chronological order.

## §1. Chronology of the Degrees & History of the Temple

All of the Symbolic and Capitular Degrees, with the exception of the Royal Arch Degree, take place during the First Temple period. The EA and FC Degrees do not specifically relate events in the Hiramic Legend, and therefore are difficult to place in the chronology. However, due to their emphasis on the building of King Solomon's Temple, I place them in the First Temple period. Solomon is said to have lived from about 990 to 931 BC and reigned for 40 years. As stated in the Master Mason's Lecture<sup>1</sup>, the Temple "was founded in the fourth year of the reign of Solomon," which would be circa 966 BC. Solomon's father, King David, designed but was not permitted to begin construction on the Temple, so by saying it was *founded* in 966 means that this was the beginning of construction<sup>2</sup>, *i.e.*, laying of the foundation. The Temple took 7 years to build, so it was completed about 959 BC and stood for around 370 years, till it was destroyed by the Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian King, in 586 BC.

The events of the MM Degree obviously take place during the construction of the Temple, as do those of the Mark Master Degree—originally being viewed as the second half of the

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<sup>1</sup> *Manual of Work*, Grand Lodge of Virginia (GLVA), 2012 Ed. Not part of the secret work.

<sup>2</sup> *Found (v.t.): establish or originate; plan and begin the building of* (Oxford English dictionary).

Fellowcraft Degree—where they are bringing stones from the quarries for the completion of the Temple. The Cryptic Degrees of Select and Royal Master also take place during the construction, with the Select Master roughly contemporaneous with the MM Degree. The next Degree in the sequence is that of Most Excellent Master (MEM), which takes place after completion of the Temple, and on the occasion of its dedication.

Lastly, though it seems to interrupt and is disconnected from the narrative of the Hiramite Legend, is the Past Master's Degree. I would submit this is the last of the First Temple Degrees, as evidenced by the presence of an aged and infirm King Solomon. (Note that the Temple was constructed early in Solomon's reign, so it stood for most of his tenure as king; although said to have been aged, he would have been only around 59 or 60 at the time of his death.)

[Thanks for this chronology go to the *Capitular Development Course: A Modern Monitor*, by Piers A Vaughn, PGHP of the Grand Chapter of the State of New York, p. 20-21.]

Everything up to the Royal Arch Degree takes place during the First Temple period. That Degree takes place some 440 years after the MEM Degree, during reconstruction of the walls of Jerusalem and preparations for construction of the Second Temple. After 70 years in captivity, the Jews were allowed to return to Jerusalem. Ezra brought the Book of the Law (the Torah) to Jerusalem and expounded it, Nehemiah rebuilt the city walls, after which Zerubbabel completed the Second Temple on the ruins of the first around 516 BC. Due to continual harassment by hostile locals and political changes (first Cyrus the Great of Persia, then Cambyses II, and finally Darius the Great, father of Xerxes), it took over 20 years to complete. Zerubbabel's Temple was expanded under Herod the Great around 20 BC and stood until AD 70, when it was once again destroyed, this time by the Roman General Titus.

Also falling during this Second Temple period is the honorary Cryptic Degree of Super Excellent Master, which takes place slightly earlier than that of Royal Arch Mason (RAM), as parts of this Degree take place around the time of the destruction of Solomon's Temple. We will leave aside the Orders of Knighthood, since not who are Royal Arch Masons have received them, but they also cover events taking place during or after the Second Temple period.

So if only very small portions of our Degrees take place during the Second Temple period—and mainly very early in its construction—why should we care?

## **§2. Masonic Significance of the Second (Zerubbabel's) Temple**

Let us first look at a comparison between the First and Second Temples. If we think of the Second Temple as a substitute for the First, we have an allegory very similar to that of Lost Word—the loss of the Master's Word, adoption of the Substitute Word, and recovery of the True Word. (That the destruction of the Temple and the Lost Word can be thought of as having a similar meaning is revealed in that once the Holy of Holies was consecrated, and indwelt by the *Shekinah*, the High Priest entered once a year to pronounce the Ineffable Name, יהוה. Once the Temple was destroyed, this was no longer possible and the true pronunciation was lost.) Yet we are builders, and continually called on to build and rebuild, though our imperfect works may be torn down by “*the lapse of time, the ruthless hand of ignorance, and the devastations of war*”<sup>3</sup>. But we are instructed to continually ascend Jacob's ladder with Faith, Hope, and Charity, and rebuild whatever the cost. Brethren of the Scottish Rite will recognize these themes are running through the latter Degrees of the Lodge of Perfection and culminating in the 18° Knight Rose Croix.

There are minutely detailed instructions in I Kings and II Chronicles for the construction of Solomon's Temple, but very scant detail concerning that of Zerubbabel's Temple (which is treated in the Book of Ezra). [Note that Ezra I, to which the Holy Bible is open in the Chapter, relates the Proclamation of Cyrus that the House of the LORD be rebuilt.]

It is thought that the Second Temple was built—as was true of many ancient temples—on the same general scheme as the First, but with two important differences: (1) the Second Temple was roughly one third larger than the original—possibly to reinforce it against any further attacks—and (2) the furnishings were far less sumptuous, the people having come out of captivity in poverty. Josephus (*The Antiquities of the Jews*, XI:4:2) reports that those who remembered the First Temple wept at the lowly appearance of the Second. This Second Temple actually lasted longer than the First—some 585 years, vs. 370 years for the First. This indicates to us that when calamity strikes and we are forced to rebuild, we

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<sup>3</sup> *Manual of Work*, GLVA, Fellowcraft Degree material.

should rebuild stronger than before. I am reminded of the phrase—*‘That which does not kill us makes us stronger.’* We also need to rebuild on the same foundation—our ancient landmarks. The Second Temple was built directly over the ruins of the First.

I will end with words from Albert G. Mackey’s *Cryptic Masonry: A Manual of the Council*:

*In the masonic system there are two temples; the first temple, in which the degrees of Craft Masonry are concerned, and the second temple, with which the higher degrees, and especially the Royal are, are related. The first temple is symbolic of the present life; the second temple is symbolic of the life to come. The first temple, the present life, must be destroyed; on its foundations the second temple, the life eternal, must be built.*

[Select Master section]

Mackey has quite a bit to say about the Second Temple. I will end by noting that although the Holy Vessels were brought back from the Captivity, the Ark of the Covenant is not mentioned again after the destruction of the First Temple (Jeremiah 3:16). Neither the Ark nor the *Shekinah*—the descent of which is featured in the MEM Degree, and also mentioned in the Royal Master Degree—were in the Second Temple. However, according to Mackey, the Foundation Stone, upon which the First Temple was built, was unearthed and made the Altar of the Second Temple, and a replica of the Ark placed thereon.<sup>4</sup> The Stone of Foundation represents Divine Truth and the Lost Word *‘concealed in the first temple, but discovered and brought to light in the second.’*

Let us end by citing the admonition of the King’s Lecture—that we not view these Degrees as ‘unmeaning rites,’ but rather that we dwell and mediate on their meaning, and they will gradually unfold their incommunicable secrets to our hearts.

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<sup>4</sup> Uncertain as to the exact citation for this.