

King Solomon's Temple Then and Now

By
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A large part of the symbolic Lodge degrees is based on the building of King Solomon's Temple. While we as Masons are very familiar with the allegory of this degree, we frequently are not aware of the facts behind it.

Following the Hebrew exodus from Egypt about 1445 B.C., Moses was given the *Ten Commandments* by God on Mount Sinai. During the forty years of wandering in the wilderness, prior to entering the Promised Land, the *Ten Commandments* were carried in the ark of the covenant as described in Exodus Chapter 37. It is interesting to note that the ark was made of acacia wood, the same wood sprig that was used to mark Hiram's burial spot in the Master Masons Degree and the same sprig that we use today in the Masonic funeral service.

The ark of the covenant was considered the most sacred "cult object" of the Jewish Religion and was kept in the Tabernacle until King Solomon's Temple was built. Solomon's father, David, had been given the crown as King and had located both his secular capital and the religious center in Jerusalem, "The City of David." While David had planned to build the temple, God commanded that since he had been a war king, the temple would instead be built by his son. Solomon ascended the throne in 970 B.C. In 959 B.C. the Temple was com-

pleted after seven years of construction. I Kings chapters 5-6 and II Chronicles 2-3 detail the arrangements of material and labor from King Hiram of Tyre (Lebanon) and the construction of the Temple.

The first task to be undertaken was to build a huge foundation of stone to level the steep hills in Jerusalem. This foundation still stands today and is known as the temple mount. A part of that same structure is frequently seen in the news today and is called the wailing wall. The Temple itself was described as being sixty cubits long, twenty cubits wide, and thirty cubits high and in today's terms would be one hundred five feet by thirty-five feet by fifty-two feet, since a cubit is twenty-one inches long. By comparison, a basketball floor is fifty feet wide and ninety-four feet long and would actually have twenty-two percent more square feet than did the Temple.

The Temple was divided into three areas described as: 1) The Porch (ten by twenty cubits), 2) The Main Hall (twenty by forty by twenty cubits) where offerings were made by the Priests, 3) The Most Holy Place (twenty by twenty by twenty cubits) where the Ark of the Covenant resided. To the Jews, The Most Holy Place (Sanctum Santorum) was the residing place of God on earth and the resting spot for the Ark of the Covenant. The Most Holy Place was only accessed



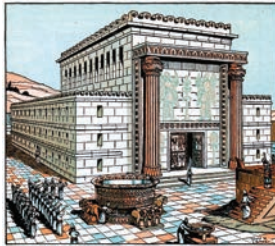
once each year by the High Priest on the Day of Atonement. He had a rope tied around his waist as he entered God's presence so that if he were struck down, the other priests could retrieve his body (similar to a cable tow).

While the exterior of the Temple was made of stone, the roof was made of wood, the walls paneled in cedar, and the floors made of juniper. Gold was used to overlay the interior of The Most Holy Place and on the doors, and throughout the Temple were elaborate carvings. At the entranceway stood two large bronze columns standing twenty-seven feet tall and nearly eight feet thick named Jachin (He will establish) and Boaz (In him is strength).

In 1 Kings 6:7 it states "In building the Temple, only blocks dressed at the quarry were used, and no hammer or other iron tool was heard at the Temple site while it was being built." This same description is included in the Master Mason Degree.

In 587 B.C., Israel fell to the Babylonians, and the Temple was destroyed which heralded a period called the Babylonian Captivity. Some seventy years passed before the Jews were allowed

to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple and the city walls. By the time of Christ's birth, the Romans controlled Judea and most all of the area around the Mediterranean Sea. While the Roman Legions served as an occupation army, local administrative and religious life was under the control of a Jewish king named Herod the Great who had been placed on the throne in 37 B.C. Herod completely rebuilt the Temple and it was then known as Herod's Temple or



the Second Temple. In 70 A.D. this Temple was destroyed by the Romans during a period of Jewish revolt. Today the Temple Mount still exists and is considered a holy place by Christianity as the place where Christ walked, by

the Jews as the site of the Temple, and by Muslims as the site where Mohammed ascended into heaven. Today The Dome of the Rock, a Muslim Mosque built in 691 A.D., covers the site which is called "The Foundation Stone."

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Sources

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Wikipedia

"I contend that for a nation to try to tax itself into prosperity is like a man standing in a bucket and trying to lift himself up by the handle."

— Winston Churchill