

This article presents the author's views which are not necessarily those of the Grand Encampment or any person representing the Grand Encampment.

The Jesus Connection

by Sir Knight Jeffrey L. Kuntz, Sr. Warden, 32°

What? Wait a minute! Jesus a Freemason?

To make such an assertion would make the jaws of even many a Masonic Brother drop, not to mention those of non-Masons, especially, perhaps, Christian clergymen.

Freemasonry in America, as we know it today, basically originated in England in 1717 and is believed by many Masonic historians to be descended from the builders' guilds of operative masons in Europe in the Middle Ages, whose members built the great cathedrals of that time. It would, therefore, be rather surprising to hear anyone claim that Jesus the Christ, the Messiah, was a member of our fraternity.

However, let us take a look even much further back in history. Many Masonic historians agree that Freemasonry has roots going back as far as Old Testament times. In fact, as all good Masons know, the teachings of our great order are-in part, at least based on the building of King Solomon's Temple and the rebuilding of the Temple after the exile. Some believe that these teachings go back to the mystery schools of the ancient Egyptians and other groups that have served as channels of esoteric knowledge.

Those rather misguided individuals who are opposed to Freemasonry, whether they be certain clergy, or whoever, would be surprised to be informed that the fraternity is largely structured on events in the Bible, and that both York Rite and Scottish Rite Masonry are based on passages in the Old Testament in the "lower" or earlier degrees, beginning with the book of Genesis, and are based on events in the New Testament in some of the "higher" or later degrees.

There are certain passages in both the Old and New Testaments that should draw the attention of any alert York Rite Mason. Psalm 118 (verse 22) in the King James version of the Bible states: "The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner." Jesus referred to this verse when reciting the parable of the tenant in the vineyard in Matthew 21: 33-45.

The apostle Paul in the second chapter of his Epistle to the Ephesians refers directly to Christ as being the cornerstone. Paul was writing to the Gentiles there assuring them that they, too, were now built upon the foundation - that is, the spiritual foundation - laid by the prophets and apostles, which is really what Solomon's Temple and the rebuilding of the second temple represent, being rich in symbolism.

It is interesting, too, to note that the plumb line is mentioned in the book of the prophet Amos in chapter 7, verses 7 and 8. In the fourth chapter of Zechariah, Zerubbabel is described as holding the plummet (plumb line) in his hand as God promises Israel that the temple will be rebuilt.

Coming back to the New Testament, then, in the second chapter of Matthew, we read in the Christmas story about the "wise men from the east." Does this necessarily mean they came from the direction of the east? In the Bible, certain words, such as proper names, etc., mean something. In Masonry, we know, since the sun rises in the east, that (verse 5), Paul was called a "ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes."

Another interesting form of the name is Nazarite. This goes back to the sixth chapter of the book of Numbers. Nazarites were those of a group of Israelites who showed a special devotion to God by taking certain vows, one of which was to never shave or cut their hair. Sampson was a Nazarite, as written in the book of Judges.

During the last several centuries before the birth of Christ to about the year 250 A.D., there existed another the direction of the east is symbolic of light and enlightenment. The Magi were likely highly enlightened mystics and possibly astrologers.

Another rather curious matter dealing with the meanings of names is the fact that Jesus was called a Nazarene, and that as a boy He lived in a city called Nazareth. Both "Nazarene" and "Nazareth" mean "separated." It is interesting to find that a city called Nazareth is not mentioned anywhere in either the Old Testament or in any Judaic literature. There are historians who claim that a town by that name did not exist in Galilee at that time and that the name was indicative of Jesus being a member of a secret sect or order that existed in Northern Palestine for centuries. Quite interestingly, also, in the 24th chapter of the Acts of the Apostles very important order or sect called the Essenes, with which Freemasons should be somewhat familiar. They were the possessors of the Dead Sea Scrolls that were discovered in the late 1940s in caves near the Qumran community along the northwest corner of that body of water.

Certain passages of some of those scrolls give indications of what some Biblical scholars and occultists had thought even before the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls-that Jesus and also John the Baptist were Essenes. Some of the parables Jesus used are very similar to those in the scrolls. The teachings and writing style of the Gospel of John are similar to certain scrolls, as are some other New Testament books.

The question would, naturally, occur to some: Why did Jesus never speak of the Essenes, or why are they not even mentioned in the Bible? In all likelihood, those who were taken into the order were very strictly bound to a vow of secrecy. Could it be, however, that the Essenes and Nazarenes were actually one in the same?

There is no doubt in the minds of some students of Christian mysticism that Jesus was, indeed, a member of the order of the Essenes and that that is where He spent most, if not all, of His time from the time He was a teenager to age thirty, preparing for His very special ministry, which was prophesied centuries before. To say that the one who was to become the great Messiah was a worker in His father's carpenter shop for fifteen years or so is ridiculous. It seems like it would have been a terrible waste of His time, does it not?

There is a very curious story about Jesus as a young boy in the apocryphal book known as the First Gospel of the Infancy of Christ. Joseph took Jesus to the school master Zaccheus to learn His Hebrew letters. As the teacher began to instruct Jesus to name the Hebrew characters, the boy soon turned the tables on Zaccheus by asking him the meaning of "Aleph," the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet. As the master was about to whip Jesus, the boy preceded to explain the meaning of each part of each Hebrew letter and why the letters were in a certain order. Freemasons who have received certain degrees should know that each of the Hebrew letters has certain import. After Jesus finished the alphabet, the master was so astonished that he said, "I believe this boy was born before Noah," and to Mary he said, "Your son has no need of any learning." In a following passage in the Infancy Gospel is a story which is supposed to be an elaboration of the narrative in the second chapter of Luke's Gospel about the twelve-year old Jesus in the temple discussing higher learning with the Jewish teachers. The Infancy passage states that the young Jesus explained such things to them as, "the mysteries which are contained in the books of the prophets; things which the mind of no creature could reach." They were amazed at His knowledge of such fields of learning as astronomy, natural philosophy, and the study of metaphysics, which is partly what Freemasonry is actually about.

Another interesting passage found in the final chapter of this apocryphal book states, "Now from this time, Jesus began to conceal his miracles and secret works, and he gave himself to the study of the law, until he arrived at the end of his thirtieth year." The passage then goes directly into Jesus' baptism in the Jordan River. Perhaps, this is one of the stronger clues to His association with Essene community.

Many other incidents written in this apocryphal gospel concerning Jesus' early years seem even more bizarre, which is one reason this was one of the many apocryphal works that did not make the Biblical canon. This certainly does not necessarily mean there are not worthy messages in these noncanonical writings, especially when they tie in or even shed light on those of the Biblical canon.

Many Bible scholars agree that the Scriptures are meant to be much more a collection of writings about life's moral lessons than a precise history. Some, also, believe there is much symbolism in the form of metaphor and allegory in the canonical books as well as in the Apocrypha. In fact, some will go so far as to say that real personages are sometimes used in allegory.

For those who have especially open and pondering minds and a love for allegory and hidden meaning in the Scriptures, one could take the reference of Jesus as a carpenter's son to have a cryptic meaning-with a Masonic tie-in at that! After all, don't Masons use carpenter tools as symbols to teach character building? Of course, the biblical literalists have a definite problem with such interpretations-as they would with the Nazarene claim-and even many casual Bible readers would consider that a stretch! At any rate, some contemplation of the idea might be good exercise for the mind, if nothing else.

It is interesting to note that in Arthur Edward Waite's *A New Encyclopaedia of Freemasonry* similarities between the Essenes and the Freemasons are stated: a) women were not admitted into the inner workings; b) they used certain signs of recognition; and c) their rituals were followed by a meal in common.

Perhaps more important, however, is the evidence in records, including the writings of such ancient authors as Plato, Josephus, Eusebius, and others, that some of the teachings and symbols we use in Freemasonry were also inculcated upon the members and candidates of the Essenes. Some of these symbols were also found in identical form in Egypt, China, and in all parts of the ancient world, including, strangely enough, Mexico and Central America.

Maybe here it is well to emphasize the importance of the use of symbols in spiritual and mental development. Symbols and ritual mean something, and their meanings have been ingrained into the subconsciousness of man for thousands of years. Careful contemplation of these symbols, according to occultists and students of mysticism, can aid in the development of wisdom, understanding, and even mental powers.

The development of spiritual and mental powers by the ancient esoteric societies such as the Essenes is, some believe, one of the main reasons such communities and sects met or even lived in secret. If their ceremonies and teachings had been freely given out, they not only would have set themselves up for ridicule, but they would have risked the dangerous misuse of their special knowledge by the unenlightened.

Some Christian mystic scholars believe this was what Christ was referring to when, according to Matthew 7: 6, He said: "Give not that which is holy unto dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet and turn again and rend you."

Students of the occult believe that in remote periods of history there were civilizations that, after learning and developing the powers of the universe that are intertwined with the human mind, eventually lost touch with their spiritual nature and began using these powers for evil purposes, ultimately leading to their own destruction. This, they believe, is the main reason that an initiation system was created, placing candidates into levels or degrees of instruction and testing them as they advance to higher grades of knowledge and abilities.

If Jesus did live in seclusion with the Essenes until his thirtieth year, it was then time for him to begin his very special ministry in the outside world. He then formed His own band of followers. His innermost followers were the twelve disciples, who became known as the "apostles."

There are fairly strong indications in the four gospels that Jesus shared certain knowledge with His inner circle of these twelve specially chosen disciples that, at least for a time, was to be kept secret. After Jesus told the parable of the sower to a crowd, His disciples came to Him asking why He spoke in parables. He answered: "Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries (secrets) of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given." (Matthew 13: 11) This incident is also recorded in the fourth chapter of Mark and in the eighth chapter of Luke, but in the account of Matthew, Jesus gives a fuller explanation of His parables.

Paul spoke of the secret teachings in several of his epistles. In his first letter to the Corinthians, he wrote: "You should think of us as Christ's servants who have been put in charge of God's secret truths." In the third chapter of his letter to the Ephesians, Paul wrote: "How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery;...which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit." (verses 3 and 5)

Perhaps, Paul divulged the basis of the greatest truth in his letter to the Colossians, "...and the secret is that Christ is in you..." (Col. 1: 27) Was Paul telling us that the way to total inner peace while on earth, as well as to eternal salvation, is learning to be attuned to the Christ within?

When the time neared for Christ to be crucified, He spoke to the disciples about why He had to suffer such an end, but those things not even they were prepared to understand. "I have used figures of speech to tell you these things," He told them in John 16: 25, "but the time will come when I will not use figures of speech, but will speak to you plainly about the Father." As recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, after Christ's Ascension, the apostles performed miracles and healed many sick people. Before the Crucifixion, they had finished their training under Jesus the Christ, learning to master the forces of God which enabled them to perform such works. In the fourteenth chapter of the Gospel of John, Jesus said: "Verily, verily I say unto you, he that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father. And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it." (verses 12-14)

This is one passage where Jesus was speaking quite plainly. There really can be little doubt what He meant. Most Christians today, however, either misunderstand, misinterpret, or simply ignore the passage. Yes, Christ's message was one of love and faith, but as He also clearly taught, through strong and truly spiritual love and faith, we are able to do great and marvelous things! Perhaps, most Freemasons today would think it unthinkable that Jesus Christ would have been a member of a fraternal order similar to our present-day Masonic order. Maybe we should ask

ourselves, however, what exactly Freemasonry is. From the study of ancient symbology and mysticism could we conclude that modern Freemasonry is a vestige of or a kind of diluted variant in the line of ancient esoteric mystery schools which go back thousands of years? From a perusal of certain passages of Scripture, can we conclude that the great prophets, Jesus Christ, and his apostles, and even some of the saints of the early Church were highly advanced initiates of ancient mystery schools?

The question here that would naturally come to the minds of some is why this higher knowledge was not passed on through the Christian Church. According to some scholars, some of these teachings were, indeed, held by the very early Church fathers. Dr. H. Spencer Lewis, who was Imperator for the Rosicrucian Order in America, in his book, *The Mystical Life of Jesus*, explained that there are records in the archives of the Roman Catholic Church in the Vatican containing much of these teachings and unknown information about the life of Jesus, but that these records were suppressed by later Church leaders.

After the conversion of Constantine in the early fourth century, Christianity became the established official religion of the Roman empire. In his very interesting book, *The Hidden Bible*, William Leary explains how the Church leaders of that time modified the Christian religion to meet their political needs. This was done, for the most part, in order to appeal to the illiterate masses who could not comprehend the loftier teachings of Christianity. Leary wrote: "The deeper knowledge of the Christian teaching gradually disappeared, and became the Lost Word."

Freemasonry can certainly not take the place of the Church. It must, in fact, support the Church. Perhaps, we can see, however, that there is, to some extent at least, a connection, a kinship, between the more mystical teachings of Jesus and our beloved fraternal order of Freemasonry, even if it be an attenuated vessel of the higher knowledge. Can we as Freemasons, as Knights Templar, perhaps someday find the Lost Word? Masonic membership has declined in recent years, as has church attendance, but one thing for sure is that our work as Freemasons, as well as Christians, is of the utmost importance now at a time when it is, without any doubt, needed as much as ever.

Sir Knight Jeffrey Kuntzis Sr. Warden of Baldwin II Commandery No. 22, Williamsport, Pennsylvania. He resides at: 179 OCR, A 15, Montoursville, PA 17754