

The Life and Times of “Zerubbabel”



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The Stone of Foundation

Within this talk you will find reference to the "Stone of Foundation".

The Stone of Foundation constitutes one of the most important of all the symbols of Freemasonry

In Masonry it is a symbol of the higher degrees, making its first appearance in Royal Arch Masonry. It is, however, intimately connected with the construction of Solomon's Temple, in its legendary history, and hence of importance in the first three Degrees. It must be kept in mind also that this Stone of Foundation in Masonry is to be taken strictly in a mythical and allegorical sense, and not as historical record. According to Masonic legend, the Stone of Foundation was placed at one time within the foundation of the Temple of Solomon, and afterward, during the building of the Second Temple, transported to the Holy of Holies. It was in form a perfect cube, and had inscribed upon its upper face, within a triangle, the Ineffable Name of God. Masonic tradition further holds that this "Stone of Foundation," on which the sacred name was mystically engraved, was placed by Solomon, with solemn rites, in the sacred depository of Dan and Asher on Mt. Moriah, at the centre of the Most Holy Place.

The legend which claims that Enoch made a triangular plate of gold, triangular in form and with the Ineffable Name engraved which was placed upon a stone in cubic form and placed in an underground temple on Mt. Moriah is popular. According to this legend, this Stone of Foundation was discovered by Solomon in the excavations on Mt. Moriah for the building of the Temple. For the Mason who has advanced through the Royal Arch Degree, and on into higher degrees, these legends and the symbolic deductions are of great moment. The foundation Stone of the earth, called "corner-stone," laid by God... — ([Job 38:4-7](#))

it is unavoidable that reference should be made to the legends as well. In writing about the life of Zerubbabel from a Masonic point of view,

THE EARLY YEARS.

who he was and what he did.

Well, I decided to study Zerubbabel a bit further and find out exactly

Order the first built by Solomon, the second, now - by Zerubbabel. Second. I never even knew that there had been two, until I joined this the first Temple, the one built by Solomon, and the building of the that this Order in Freemasonry is all about the discovery of the ruins of It was only when I became a member of Royal Arch that I discovered Solomon.

Very little I know - but I had heard of, and knew a little about King books etc. and of course the building of the Temple at Jerusalem. familiar to you through various films, e.g. King Solomon's Mines and heard the name of King Solomon mentioned, it was relatively. It is more than likely that when you were initiated into Freemasonry,

reasons for this.

curiosity was aroused so I decided to find out more about him, and the Most Excellent and First Principal in a Royal Arch Chapter? My Sunday school etc. but who on earth was Zerubbabel. Why is he the Craft. I had heard of Haggai and Joshua from my school days and represented as I could attribute them to the Master and two Wardens in After my Exaltation I basically understood what the three Principals I expect many of you were like me when you first joined Royal Arch.

INTRODUCTION

Zerubbabel

as to the more strictly historical details of his eventful career. Within the traditions of the Royal Arch, and some other degrees, Zerubbabel is no less closely connected with this Order, than is Solomon with those of Symbolic or Ancient Craft Masonry.

To understand those traditions properly, they must be placed in their appropriate place in the life of him who plays so important a part in them. Some of these legends have the support of the Scriptures, and some appear to have no historical foundation. I cannot vouch for the authenticity of either, but; they must be told, to make the Masonic life of the builder of the second Temple complete.

Zerubbabel, who, in the Book of Ezra, is called Sheebazzar, the Prince of Judah, was the grandson of King Jehoiachim, who had been deposed by Nebuchadnezzar, and taken as a captive to Babylon. He was born in the city of Babel, better known as Babylon in about 566 BCE. His father, Shealatiel, was the son of Jehoiachim; although the Book of Chronicles says his father was Pedaiah.

To explain this I must point out Shealatiel and Pedaiah were half-brothers. After Shealatiel died, Pedaiah married his widow and the offspring of the union of Pedaiah and the widow of Shealatiel was possibly Zerubbabel. Zerubbabel would then be regarded as the legal heir (i.e. son) of Shealatiel even though his genetic father was Pedaiah. All this was in sync with the custom of levirate marriage described in [Deuteronomy 25:5-10](#).

There is no record that I can find of who his mother was but it is likely to be Shealatiel's first wife Hachalya.

The biblical record of that edict reads as follows: *(Ezra 1:2-4)*. Thus, with Cyrus king of Persia, The LORD God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the LORD God of Israel, (he is the God) which is in Jerusalem. And whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourneth, let the men of his place help him with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, and beside the freewill offering for the house of God that is in Jerusalem.

When the Persians overthrew the Babylonian empire (539 B.C.), Cyrus, the conqueror, issued a proclamation releasing the Jews from their seventy-year period of captivity.

THE DECREE OF CYRUS

The remains of the city of Babel are in present-day Hillah, in the Babil Governorate of Iraq, about 53 miles south of Baghdad, comprising a large "tell" of broken mud-brick buildings and debris. A "tell" is a hill created by many generations of people living and rebuilding on the same spot. Over time, the level rises, forming a mound. The single biggest contributor to the mass of a "tell" are mud bricks, which disintegrate rapidly. Excavating a "tell" can reveal buried structures such as government or military buildings, religious shrines and homes, located at different depths depending on their date of use. A classic "tell" looks like a low, truncated cone with a flat top and sloping sides



THE JOURNEY HOME

As soon as the Decree of Cyrus had been circulated to his Jewish subjects, around 538BCE, the Tribes of Judah and Benjamin, with the Priests and Levites, gathered at Babylon, and prepared for their return to Jerusalem, for the express purpose of rebuilding the Temple. Zerubbabel would have been about 28 years of age. It was one of the most extraordinary acts in international history.

Because of his ancestry, remember he was the grandson of King Joachim, he was given regal authority, and also the command and control of the returning captives was conferred on him by Cyrus, who, according to a Masonic tradition, presented him with the sword which Nebuchadnezzar had received from his grandfather, Jenoachim.

A few members from the other Tribes, whose love of their country and its ancient worship had not been eradicated by the luxuries of the Babylonian court, united with the followers of Zerubbabel, and accompanied him to Jerusalem, although many remained in Babylon. Only forty-two thousand three hundred and sixty Israelites, exclusive of servants and slaves, accompanied Zerubbabel. From these he selected seven thousands of the most courageous, whom he placed as an advanced guard at the head of the people.

Cyrus also restored to the Jews the greater part of the sacred vessels of the Temple which had been carried away by Nebuchadnezzar. Five thousand and four hundred were received by Zerubbabel, the remainder being brought back, many years later, by Ezra.

Their progress homeward, (the Promised Land) was not altogether free from danger.

Tradition informs us that at the river Euphrates they were opposed by the Assyrians, who, driven by the temptation of the vast amount of golden vessels which they were carrying, became very confrontational, and, despite the objection of the Jews, and the Edict of Cyrus, disputed their rite of passage. Zerubbabel, however, repulsed the enemy with

such commitment as to ensure an overwhelming victory, most of the Assyrians having been slain in the battle, or drowned in their attempt to cross the river in their retreat. The rest of the journey was uninterrupted, and, after a march of four months, Zerubbabel arrived at Jerusalem, with his weary followers, at seven o'clock on the morning of the 22nd of June, five hundred and thirty-five years BCE.

Throughout their captivity, the Jews had continued, without intermission, to practice the rights of Freemasonry, and had established regular Lodges in Chaldea. Fraternity in Judea which gives additional strength to, the traditions of the Royal Arch Degree.

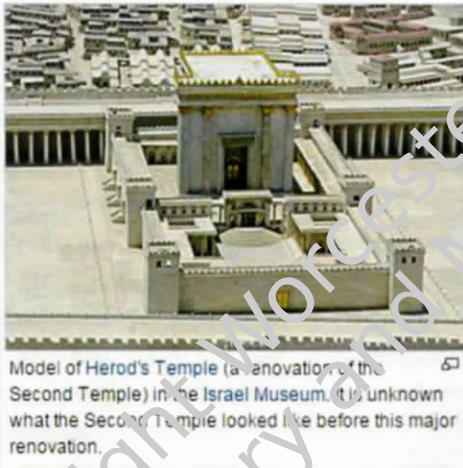
THE BUILDING OF THE TEMPLE

As soon as the pilgrims had arrived at Jerusalem, and rested for seven days, a Tabernacle for the temporary purposes of divine worship was erected near the ruins of the ancient Temple, and a Council was called, in which Zerubbabel presided as King, Joshua as High Priest, and Haggai as Scribe, or principal officer of State. It was there they determined to commence the building of the second Temple upon the same holy spot, which had been occupied by the first, and the people liberally contributed sixty-one thousand drachms of gold, and five thousand minas of silver, or nearly a quarter of a million of dollars, towards the cost of building the new Temple; a sum which sinks into utter insignificance, when compared with the immense amount appropriated by David and Solomon for the construction of their Temple.



Having decided upon the site, it was necessary to clear the remnants of the old Temple, which still covered it, thus preventing the workmen from making a start on the foundations of the new Temple. It was during this operation that an important discovery was made by three Sojourners, (today we would call them “travellers”) who had not originally accompanied Zerubbabel, but who had remained longer in Babylon, following their countrymen later on, and had arrived at Jerusalem just in time to assist in the removal of the debris.

During their labours, the three Sojourners allegedly discovered that Stone of Foundation, so intimately connected with the history of



Model of Herod's Temple (a renovation of the Second Temple) in the Israel Museum. It is unknown what the Second Temple looked like before this major renovation.

Freemasonry and to which we have previously referred. They are believed by a Masonic tradition to have been Esdras, Zachariah, and Nehemiah, the three holy men, who, for refusing to worship the golden image, had been thrown by Nebuchadnezzar into a fiery furnace, from which they emerged uninjured.

In the Chaldean language, they were known by the names of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

It was in excavating into some of the subterranean vaults, that the Masonic “Stone of Foundation”, and other important mysteries connected with it, were discovered by the three fortunate Sojourners, and presented by them to Zerubbabel and his companions Joshua and

As soon as that wonderful discovery was made, on which depends not only the existence of the Royal Arch Degree, but the most important mystery of Freemasonry, the Jews proceeded on a certain day, before the rising of the sun, to lay the foundation-stone of the second Temple; and for that purpose, we are told, Zerubbabel selected that "stone of foundation" which had been discovered by the three Sojourners. On this occasion, we learn that the young cheered, shouted and applauded, but that the older people were not at all happy. As the temple was being rebuilt, there was a group of Jews in Jerusalem who were rather disappointed. Older Jews who could recall the grandeur of the first temple regarded Zerubbabel's temple as a poor substitute for the original. To their minds, it did not even begin to compare with the splendour of Solomon's temple. It was true that Zerubbabel's temple was built on a smaller scale and with much fewer resources than Solomon's temple had been. Also, Solomon's temple had housed the Ark of the Covenant, had witnessed fire from heaven, and had been filled with the "Shekinah" or the Divine Presence of God. Still, Haggai prophesied that this second temple would one day have a magnificence to outshine the glory of the first temple. Haggai's word was fulfilled

Foundation.

Haggai, whose traditional knowledge of Freemasonry, which they had received in a direct line from the builders of the first Temple, enabled them at once to appreciate the great importance of these treasures. The Stone of Foundation makes its first appearance in the Royal Arch, and forms, indeed, the most important symbol of the degree. But it is so intimately connected, in its legendary history, with the construction of Solomon's temple, that it must be considered as a part of Ancient Craft Masonry, although if we confine ourselves and knowledge to the first three degrees of Freemasonry, we will have no means, within that narrow limit, of properly appreciating the symbolism of the *Stone of*

500 years later when Jesus entered the temple. Zerubbabel's temple was not as outwardly impressive as Solomon's, but it had a greater glory: the Messiah Himself walked the courts of the temple Zerubbabel helped build.

According to the Tanach, (the Jewish scriptures which consist of three divisions - the Torah and the Prophets and the Writings), the first Temple had been approximately 180 feet long, 90 feet wide and 50 feet high. Massive amounts of cedar wood imported from the kingdom of Tyre were used in its construction. King Solomon also had enormous blocks of fine stone quarried and hauled to Jerusalem, where they served as the foundation of the Temple. Pure gold was used as an overlay in some parts of the Temple.

As in the building of the first Temple, so in this, the people of Tyre and Sidon were engaged to supply the timber from the Forests of Lebanon, and to transport it by sea to Joppa. - Joppa is modern day Jaffa - a town of some 60000 surrounded by Tel Aviv. Scarcely had they started on the Temple when they were interrupted by the Samaritans, who asked to be permitted to unite with them in the construction of the Temple. But the Jews, who looked upon them as idolaters, refused to accept their services.

As a consequence the Samaritans became their bitter enemies, and so prevailed by misrepresentations, with the ministers of Cyrus, as to cause them to put obstacles in the way of the construction of the Temple and so seriously impede its progress for several years. Such was the difficulty and danger in which the work was carried out during this period that the workmen were compelled to labour with the trowel in one hand and the sword in the other. To commemorate these admirable Craftsmen, who were thus ready, either to fight or to labour

in the cause of God, as circumstances might require, the sword and trowel crosswise, or, as the Heralds would say, en Satire, have been placed upon the Royal Arch Tracing Board or Carpet of our English Brethren.

In the seventh year after the restoration of the Jews, Cyrus, their friend and benefactor, died, and his son Cambyses, ascended the throne. After the death of his father in 530 BC, Cambyses became sole king and reigned from the death of Cyrus, for seven years and five months, from 530 BC to the summer of 523 BC. Throughout his reign the Samaritans and other enemies of the Jews, became bitter in their designs, and succeeded in obtaining from Cambyses a decretal order for the stoppage of all the works at Jerusalem. Consequently the Temple remained in an unfinished state until the second year of the reign of Darius, the successor of Cambyses.

Darius appears to have had, like Cyrus, a great liking for the Israelites, and especially for Zorobabel, with whom he had been well acquainted in his youth. We are informed, as an evidence of this that, when a private man, he made a vow, that if he should ever ascend the throne, he would restore all the vessels of the Temple that had been retained by Cyrus. Zorobabel was well aware of the friendly disposition of the king, and determined, immediately after his accession to power, to make a personal application to him for his assistance and protection in rebuilding the Temple. Consequently he travelled from Jerusalem to Babylon, and after a dangerous journey, in which he was continually attacked by his enemies; he was arrested as a spy by the Persian guards in the vicinity of Babylon, and carried in chains before Darius. Darius immediately recognised him as the friend and companion of his youth, and ordered his immediate release and invited him to a magnificent feast which he was about to give to the Court.

Zerubbabel, having explained to Darius the reason for his visit, pleaded with him to use his authority for the protection of the Israelites engaged in the restoration of the Temple. The King promised to grant his requests, provided he would reveal to him the secrets of Freemasonry. This Zerubbabel refused to do. He declined the favour of the monarch at the expense of his relationship, and expressed his willingness rather to suffer death or exile, than to go against his sacred obligation as a Freemason.

This firmness and commitment only served to raise his character still higher in the estimation of Darius, who seems to have been endowed with many noble qualities both of heart and mind.

The King instructed him to ask for something over and above what he had already promised.

Zerubbabel called upon the monarch to fulfil the vow that he had made in his youth, to rebuild the Temple, and restore the vessels that had been taken away by Nebuchadnezzar.

The King granted his request and promised him sufficient protection in the future building work, and sent him home to Jerusalem laden with honours, and under the safe conduct of an escort.

Although occasionally annoyed by their opponents, the builders met with no serious obstruction, and finally, in 515 BCE, twenty years after its commencement the Temple was completed; the capstone celebrated and the building solemnly dedicated to Jehovah with great joy.

It is recorded that it was completed in the sixth year of the reign of Darius, and on the third day of the month of Adar. Adar is the sixth month of the civil year and the twelfth month of the ecclesiastical year on the Hebrew calendar. It is a winter month of 29 days, which might suggest February. After this we hear nothing further of Zerubbabel, nor are the time or manner of his death either recorded in Scripture or preserved by Masonic tradition. We have, however, reason for believing, despite some records showing differently, that he lived to a good age, since we find no successor of him mentioned until Ezra was appointed as the Governor of Judea, fifty-seven years after the completion of the Temple.

I hope this introduction to Zerubbabel and his place in the history of The Holy Royal Arch, has been interesting to you, and perhaps filled in some of the gaps in your Masonic knowledge.

As the material used in this paper has been obtained from different and varied sources, with a lot of differing views and opinions, I do not make any claim on their legitimacy or accuracy. It is produced simply to give a new Member of the Supreme Order of the Holy Royal Arch an insight into the Life and Times of Zerubbabel and why he is recognised as First Principal in a Royal Arch Chapter.

Research information was obtained from.

Worcestershire Masonic Library and Museum

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