

HISTORY IS AN AFTER-THOUGHT
Written only when greatness has already been achieved.
Frank A Battaglia VII°

There was no Hebrew history before King David, who united the tribes of Israel and conquered their enemies.

Neither was there any Masonic history AS WE KNOW IT until the operative stone masons of England had established their craft by building some of those marvelous monuments to Christian civilization, The Gothic Cathedrals.

But there were Masons, and there were Hebrews long before there were books about either.

The Masonic fraternity started simply, and the magnificent brotherly structure we now enjoy was many centuries in the making.

The legends of Masonry are very old, and they tell of times far older than themselves.

The earliest legendary Masonic writing which has survived in manuscript is a little book consisting of 33 leaves of parchment written in England, sometime before 1390 A.D.

“Here begin the constitutions of the art of Geometry according to Euclid.” Are the opening lines, and it goes on to tell how Euclid taught the art of Geometry to unemployed sons of the Egyptian nobility, and how the knowledge which he taught spread to England and France, and how he admonished his pupils in 15 Articles & 15 Points to be good men¹ and worthy of the art of Geometry. By Geometry, he meant Masonry.

When the book of “Euclid’s Constitutions” was written, the Medieval stone masons organization was already old enough that its living members saw nothing ridiculous in tracing their history back to Lamech, the grandson of Adam, and through him to Pythagorus of Greece, and Hiram of Tyre.

It was old enough, at that time, that not only stone masons but gentlemen and dignitaries of the Church were interested in its legends, and impressed with its supposed continuity since Biblical times.

The next oldest Masonic writing, written only a few years later, tells substantially the same story, and also includes a reference to King Solomon's Temple. Solomon is represented as having confirmed Euclid's Articles and Points for the Government of Masons.

These two Masonic manuscripts, as well as others written over the next 300 years are what we refer to as the old charges of Masonry.

In these old writings, there are many references to "The Book", which almost certainly refers to the Bible.

REMEMBER, we're talking about an age before printing had been invented, and every book in the world had to be laboriously copied by hand. Few people at that time would have been able to read the bible, which was only written in Latin, and fewer still could own a copy.

When people could not read books, the lessons of religion had to be taught in other ways.

They were taught by sermons of the Priests, and by the ritual of the Sacrament.

They were also taught dramatically through mystery plays, performed often by the Craft Guilds. It's interesting to speculate that operative Masons may possibly have used a mystery play whose story survives today in the third degree.

Above all, the lessons of religion were taught during the middle ages through architecture and sculpture. Every village church was a message from God, and the cathedral was an entire bible. THE GENERAL PLAN, of the church, the choir, the chapels, the carved figures, the painted windows, all told the story of Gods fatherhood as clearly to the people of that day as our Bible tells it to us.

How much of our degree work is actually based upon biblical writings?

How historically accurate is our ritual, and how much of it has survived from ancient times, or how many of our stories have been embellished in recent times for the effect of drama?

How far back does masonry go?

These are the sort of questions that from time to time pop into my mind, and when I started to think what I would talk about, I thought I could come up with a talk on that subject while I was researching these things for my own information.

Well, I did the research. Most of what I will share with you is out of the Bible, & when I started reading & rereading some of the old Testament, I found some of the most fascinating stories and people I've ever read about anywhere, but I never did come up with the talk I was after. I got sidetracked reading about the building of King Solomon's Temple, and the events leading up to it.

I would highly recommend for any of you who doesn't own an English language translation of the Bible to get one. Some of the Prose is not as beautiful as it is in the King James Version, but the stories are definitely more understandable.

I'll try to cover the ground chronologically, but I will probably end up jumping back & forth in time a little bit.

How far back do you go when you're trying to tell a story? I'm never sure, but I think this story starts right after the big flood.

Noah's second son was Ham. In Bible talk, Ham Begat Canaan, whose descendents were the Jebusites. The Jebusites settled in the hill country where Jerusalem is now located. They had their stronghold on Mt. Zion, which is the upper half of the city.

After Moses led the Israeli nation out of Egypt, they wandered in the desert for 40 years in search of the land that god had promised them.

Finally, about 1400 BC they came to the place the lord had promised them he would lead them to. A land flowing with milk & honey.

Moses said to his son's, "Boys, this is the land the lord promised us. Let's go whip up on the Jebusites and take it away from them." Well, they commenced to whip up on the Jebusites, and finally, 350 years or so later in about 1049 BC, King David, with an army of 280,000 men finished the job & took MT. Zion away from the Jebusites.

As they well knew by now, this was a pretty good location for a fortress, and David established it as the religious and political capital of the country.

Sometime along about this period, King David ordered a census of the people of fighting age taken. This made the lord sore at King David, and he sent an Angel to bring a plague to Jerusalem to wipe them out. After about 70,000 people died, David apologized to god, and he looked up and saw the destroying angel standing between heaven and earth over the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite. The angel tells King David to build an altar to the lord in that spot, so King David buys the threshing floor from Oman for 15 pounds of gold and built an Altar there for offerings to the lord. This pleased God, & he told the Angel to knock it off and quit killing people.

Well, King David was a pretty religious man, and he decided that since this spot was in such high favor by the Lord, he would build a temple there for him, but God told him "You've killed too many people with all of your wars, so you can't build the temple, but your son Solomon can, and if he is faithful to me, He and his descendents will lead Israel forever, and Israel will last forever.

So King David spent the rest of his reign gathering materials for the temple. Before he retired and turned the kingdom over to his son Solomon he had gathered together for the building of the temple,

3,750 TONS of gold.
37,500 TONS of silver.
and vast quantities of bronze, iron, stone, and lumber.

Finally in 1016 BC when Solomon was 19 years old, he was installed as King of Israel.

At this time there were still a lot of the original settlers of the area, the Jebusites, the Hittites, & several others who hadn't been completely wiped out when King David took over the area. Solomon took a census of these people, and counted 153,600 of them. He rounded them up & made slaves out of them.

70,000 of them he used as laborers.
80,000 of them he used as loggers.
and 3,600 of them he used as foremen.

Hiram, the King of Tyre had been a friend of King David, and he was a friend of Solomon's. Solomon sent word to him that he needed skilled craftsmen, goldsmiths, silversmiths, weavers, brass & ironworkers, cedar trees, fir trees, & algum trees from the forests of Lebanon, & in return for this Solomon would send him 125,000 bushels of wheat, & 115,000 Gallons of olive oil annually in payment.

King Hiram also sent Hiram Abif to King Solomon to supervise the metal work & the ornamentation. He was appointed chief architect & engineer. The title 'Abif' which means 'Our Father' was used as a sign of respect & admiration.

Solomon and the two Hiram's formed a society for mutual assistance in council, skill, and wisdom that they might better execute the many designs for the various structures proposed by King David. They adopted the mysteries of the sacred order of priests, which had been transmitted to the Jewish people by Moses, to the laws & customs of the people of Palestine.

Solomon had married a daughter of the King of Egypt, and had a trade pact with the Phoenicians & drew many skilled workmen from them as well as from many of the neighboring nations. He got workmen skilled in wood, metal, and stone work.

From Gebal, came master stone squarers called Giblym to assist with the quarrying of stone.

Mt. Moriah, where they built the temple, was very steep and uneven, and there was no place with enough level ground to build it, so they built it on a large platform, supported on piers. The piers varied in size from 3 to 8 feet square, and in height from 2' to 30' as the hill slopes. This area underneath the temple was called King Solomon's stables, and there were 4000 stalls there for his horses.

The entire walled section of the city, was 1500' long with an average width of 950'. The walls enclosing it were 8-10' thick at the base, and 3-4' thick at the top, with an average height of 75 feet.

The Temple itself was 90' long, 30' wide, and 45' high, with a porch 30' long, and 15' deep across the front.

The inner chamber, which was the Most Holy place, was a perfect cube, 30' by 30'~by 30', and was overlaid with 23 tons of gold, and garnished with precious stones. The only piece of furniture kept here was the Ark of the Covenant, which had been made by Moses from Acacia wood, and was overlaid with gold inside and outside. The only thing inside this chest were the 2 tablets of stone on which Moses had received the 10 commandments. The Most Holy Place was visited only once each year by the High Priest on the Day of Atonement.

The daily food requirement for the temple was 195 bushels of flour, 390 bushels of meal, 10 oxen, 20 cattle, and 100 sheep.

Part of the deal that King Solomon had made with Hiram, King of Tyre, was that when the temple was completed, Solomon was going to give him 20 cities. When it came time to give up the cities, Solomon gave him 20 crap cities. It touches on this in 1st Kings VIII, but doesn't go into a lot of detail about the conversation that followed, except to say that King Hiram wasn't too happy with the deal.

In addition to the Pharaohs daughter who King Solomon had married, Solomon loved many foreign women who the lord had warned the Israelites not to fool with because they worshiped Idols. King Solomon had 700 wives, and 300 concubines, and in his old age, he turned to Idol worship.

These are only a very few of the many references to our ritual to be found in the old Testament.

In Judges 11 & 12 we read about Jephthah's battles with the Ammonites and the Ephramites that we refer to in the second section of the second degree. We go on to learn in Judges 11 about the deal that Jephthah made with the lord if he could whip the Ammonites. "And Jephthah made a vow to the Lord: 'If you give the Ammonites into my hands, whatever comes out of the door of my house to meet me when I return in triumph from the Ammonites will be the Lord's, and I will sacrifice it as a burnt offering.'"

When Jephthah returned to his home, who should come out to meet him but his only child, his virgin daughter.

In 1st Kings 7 we read the descriptions of the 2 large columns or pillars.

In Exodus we read about the flight from Egypt, and the building of the Tabernacle, and of the large amounts of acacia wood, silver, and gold used in its construction.

In Ruth we read about the ritual of the slipper. "Now in earlier times in Israel, for the redemption and transfer of property to become final, one party took off his sandal and gave it to the other. This was the method of legalizing transactions in Israel.

I could go on and on. In virtually every book of the Old Testament are references to some portion of our ritual. I hope that some of the above examples will whet your appetite, as they did mine, to dig deeper into the Book.

Thank You.

This paper was prepared by Frater Frank A Battaglia VII° and presented to Delaware College MSRICF on May 28, 2002 at the Masonic Home of Delaware.