

## Topics for Short Discourse at Chapter Meetings



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### 'Arks'

As Moses, after one hundred and twenty years, approached his death he gave the children of Israel the Law. It is written that he called his people together and according to Deuteronomy Ch. 31 V26 we read the commandment of Moses to the Levites which is also found in the ritual "Take this book of the law and put it in the side of the ark of the covenant of the LORD your GOD, that it may be there for a witness against thee."

Much speculation and debate has ranged over what happened to the 'Ark of the Covenant'. A book 'The Sign and the Seal' by Graham Hancock suggest that it was stolen. He follows a trail from Chartres Cathedral, the Knights Templars. He suggests that the Queen of Sheba's and King Solomon son stole the Ark and it was taken to Ethiopia. Masonic legend contends that it was destroyed in the Temple. Masonic legend suggests that a substitute Ark was hidden in a vault by King Solomon. He did this so that if the original Ark was lost or destroyed there would be something to hand on to posterity.

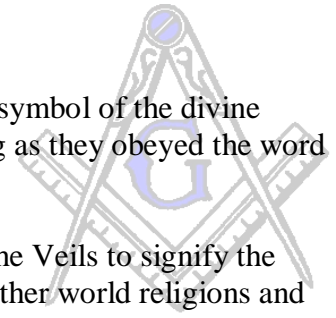
Deuteronomy is the fifth book of Moses and it is believed by scholars that this is the book that was deposited in the Ark. Not as many mistakenly suppose the entire Old Testament. The entire Old Testament was not written until much later.

Deuteronomy, the laws, in addition to those handed down, were used by the Priests during the period of captivity in Babylon and during the building of the second Temple to establish ceremonies and rituals. Ezra used this priestly code to create the Jewish nation and these traditions became the turning point in Jewish history.

Masonically, it is believed that the Pentateuch "Five Tools or Five Books" that are Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy were contained in the Ark of the Covenant. In the Ritual of the Royal Arch Degree we hear the first verse of the Book of Genesis. It would seem that in 1797 Thomas Smith Webb and his committee, who compiled the ritual we use, also believed that the five books were deposited.

The text of the Book of Deutronomy in its early form was more likely to be in Amaraic or cuneiform script cut into large tablets of stone - rather than in Hebrew. It would have been very heavy and required a large Ark, much larger than the one we are led to believe at 3 foot 9 inches in length and 2 foot 3 inches in breadth and depth. It is also a little confusing when, in our Capitular ritual, the Ark is opened and a key is discovered. It takes a stretch of imagination to believe that the 'key' can decipher symbols that relate to English letters and arrives at the long lost word. However, we must take this at face value and regard the symbolic significance.

The apocryphal legend of Hiram is completed in the Royal Arch Degree. The Ark is a symbol of the divine presence of God and to the Jewish people it represented protection and stability so long as they obeyed the word of God '...to live conformably to the precepts contained in the Book of the Law'.



There are three arks mentioned in our ritual and each is placed symbolically between the Veils to signify the metaphysical journey we travel towards Deification. Similar journeys are depicted in other world religions and metaphysical studies.

The first is the 'Ark of Safety' built by Noah with help from his sons Shem, Ham and Japheth. The second is the sacred Ark or "Ark of the Covenant" which God ordered Moses to have built and Aholiab and Bezaleel complete the work.

This Ark had three special divine attributes. The Mercy Seat was between the angels whose wings stretch over the Ark. The Shekinah '.. was a shining flame of amazing splendor of light, enveloped in a shining cloud'. This cloud is often shown in old Masonic pictures and depiction's of Freemasonry. The 'Bathkoll' was a combined Hebrew word signifying 'Voice' and 'House'. It is sometimes regarded as the oracle that 'spoke' to the High Priest.

The third or 'Substitute Ark' which according to Masonic legend was placed in the crypt and discovered by Jeshua, Zerrubabel and Hagai had none of the attributes of the original. It is suggested that the 'Substitute Ark' has a Christian significance alluding to the 'Son' of God.

Let us consider the symbolism of the Ark of the Covenant. It is placed below ground but believed to be supported by three fingers to keep it from touching the earth. Thus in suspension it is neither earth nor air, neither physical nor spiritual, but of each. It was made of 'Shittim' or 'Acacia' wood which reminds us in our Masonic ritual of the Spirit or Soul that lives when the flesh dies. It was overlaid with pure gold taken from the earth. Gold also suggests purity of heart.

Masonically, the shape of the Ark is similar to the form of a Lodge and represents '...a parallelopedon in length from East to West, in breadth from North to South, in depth from the surface of the earth to the center and even as high as the heavens'. Thus it signifies the larger outer world and the smaller inner world referred to as the Macrocosm and the Microcosm.

It reminds us of the inner self which has to be discovered and understood in our journey through life. As we ascend various levels as depicted by the veils we enter the Council or 'head'. It is here that we approach a serenity and harmony with the Spirit. We may then transcend the larger physical world into a union with God.

In the Royal Arch Degree the candidate symbolically follows a path through life. The 'Passing of the Veils' is a prelude to the journey of enlightenment that is climaxed by the discovery of the Ark. Then only by the discovery of its contents within the confines of the 'Council' is the candidate enabled to discover the Tetragrammaton and the true word of a Master Mason.

Edgar W. Fentum. 9-9-1999

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