

## Topics for Short Discourse at Chapter Meetings



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### The Destruction and Rebuilding of the Temple of King Solomon

King Solomon's Temple stood for 420 years. However, during that period faith and worship of the Lord among the Jews wavered. There were times when they turned to idolatry and had to be brought back to the path of righteousness.

After King Solomon's death ten of these wavering tribes broke away and moved to Samaria. This made the city of Jerusalem vulnerable and left only the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin to defend Judea. The weakened defenses of the city of Jerusalem could not withstand the repeated attack by the Egyptians and was finally overrun during the reign of Rehoboam. The Temple was plundered of much of its gold. However, over time many of these treasures were replaced.

In 722 BC the kingdom occupied by the 10 tribes in Samaria fell to the rule of the Assyrians and these tribes became captives. By paying a tribute to the Assyrians the tribes of Judah and Benjamin avoided this fate and the city of Jerusalem remained safe for a while.

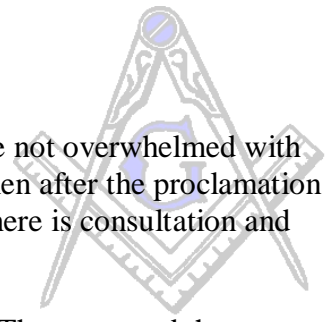
However, it was in 586 BC that Nebuzaradan entered Jerusalem, destroyed the Temple and slaughtered the people. He took the treasures, all the Holy Vessels together with thousands of survivors of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin back to Babylon. An account is found in II Chronicles Chapter 36 vs. 11 to 23. The tale of woe of these captives on their arrival in Babylon is recorded in the Book of Psalm No 137 and we hear their lament 'By the rivers of Babylon there we sat down. Yea, we wept when we remembered Zion. There we hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof. For there they carried us away captive; required of us a song; and they that wasted us; required of us mirth. How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land.'

The tribes of Judah and Benjamin remained captive in Babylon which lay some four to six months travel from their home in Judea. Here many of their children were born and the successive new generation grew up regarding Babylon as their home.

There is little doubt that the manpower, talent and skills of these tribes were put to use for the Babylonian Empire. It is also certain that, as time went by, many gained positions of prominence and wealth.

Nebuchadnezzar did not last long as the Medes and Persians invaded his kingdom and he was defeated. Eventually, Cyrus, King of Persia came to rule. He was an expansionist and extended his empire to cover most of the Middle East. This Persian Empire lasted 200 years. However, it was in the first year of the reign of King Cyrus that God came to him. Subsequently, King Cyrus issued his proclamation to rebuild the House of the Lord in Jerusalem. This is recounted in the book of Ezra Chapter 1 and shows that there were 42,360 ( a few of these were of mixed blood but were allowed to travel) that eventually made the journey to Jerusalem

When the time came to travel the descendants of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin were not overwhelmed with the generous offer to return to their own country - a hint of this is given in the ritual when after the proclamation is made - the Principal Sojourner asks 'What say you? Shall we go up to Jerusalem?' There is consultation and hesitation between the Sojourners and the Captain of the Host.



The other tribe members who remained in Judea had inter-married with the Assyrians. They resented the return of the captives as intruders upon their way of life. In return the captives viewed the residents with displeasure. These tribe members who had remained had not been steadfast in keeping the Law. Their genealogy was now no longer acceptable to the tribes of Judah and Benjamin.

A small group under the leadership of SHESHBAZZAR, the Persian name for Zerubbabel, Prince of Judah, arrived in Jerusalem in 537 B.C. and commenced the work of clearing the rubbish. Cyrus provided them with money, equipment, oxen and some of the treasures - but not all. It wasn't until the reign of Darius that the main group return to Jerusalem. It was Darius who was a man of enlightenment, a thinker and a philosopher who hastened the work and sent more gold, copper and silver with many animals for sacrifice.

There seems to be 'gap' in the Masonic legend of the degree and it may be that Zerubbabel returned to Babylon soon after he led the first group. The second larger contingent was again led by Zerubbabel and they were horrified to find ruins. Work on the Temple had been suspended for about 14 years mainly through conflict with the tribes of mixed blood. This explains the words of the First Veil who states "...disturbances having arisen from the introduction of strangers among the workmen, none are permitted to engage in this noble and glorious work except the true descendants of the twelve tribes of Israel"

It was on this second return ( If I am correct in my assumption?) of Zerubbabel (Prince and Governor), with Jeshua (High Priest), Prophets Haggai ( who was born in Babylon), Zechariah and Niamiah that in 516 BC the Temple was completed. It was Haggai who was responsible in encouraging the Jews to build the Temple and it was the leadership of Zerubbabel that finalized the result.

From 586 BC when the Temple was sacked to 516 BC to the date the Temple was completed is 70 years However, that was not the period of the exile as Zerubbabel (Sheeshbazzar) left for Jerusalem after 49 and 1/2 years in Babylon. He must have then returned to Babylon but that is not clear in the Biblical text. We read that he returned to Jerusalem again 17 and a 1/2 years later. This indicates that the tribes of Judah and Benjamin were away for over 67 years. It took 3 years to complete the Temple which makes a total of 70 years, as foretold by the prophet Jeremiah.

The curious may ask why Zerubbabel as the leader, Prince and Governor is not recognized as the First Principal Officer in our Royal Arch Degree. We in America recognize the High Priest Jeshua whereas in England it is Zerubbabel. That is another story and must wait for another time.

Edgar W. Fentum 9-9-1999

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