



LODGE VEGAS # 32

Hermes



In all the old manuscript records which contain the Legend of the Craft, mention is made of Hermes as one of the founders of Freemasonry. Thus, in the Grand Lodge Manuscript, No. 1, whose date is 1583 and the statement is substantially and almost verbally the same in all the others that "The great Hermarines that was Cubys sonne, the which Cubye was Semmes sonne, that was Noes sonne. This same Hermarines was afterwards called Hernes the father of Wysdome; he found one of the two pillars of stone, and found the science written therein, and he taught it to other men."

There are two persons of the name of Hermes mentioned in sacred history. The first is the divine Hermes, called by the Romans Mercury. Among the Egyptians he was known as Thoth. Diodorus Siculus describes him as the Secretary of Osiris; he is commonly supposed to have been the son of Mizraim, and Cumberland says that he was the same as Osiris. There is, however, much confusion among the mythologists concerning his attributes.

The second was Hermes Trismegistus or the Thrice Great, who was a celebrated Egyptian legislator, priest, and philosopher, who lived in the reign of Ninus, about the year of the world 2670. He is said to have written thirty-six books on theology and philosophy, and six upon medicine, all of which are lost. There are many traditions of him; one of which, related by Eusebius, is that he introduced hieroglyphics into Egypt. This Hermes Trismegistus, although the reality of his existence is doubtful, was claimed by the alchemists as the founder of their art, whence it is called the Hermetic Science, and whence we get in [Freemasonry](#), Hermetic Rites and Hermetic Degrees.

It is to him that the Legend of the Craft refers; and, indeed, the [York Constitutions](#), which are of importance, though not probably of the date of 926, assigned to them by Krause, give him that title, and say that he brought the custom of making himself understood by signs with him to Egypt. In the first ages of the Christian church, this mythical Egyptian philosopher was in fact considered as the inventor of everything known to the human intellect. It was fabled that [Pythagoras](#) and Plato had derived their knowledge from him, and that he had recorded his inventions on pillars. The Operative Masons, who wrote the [old Constitutions](#), obtained their acquaintance with him from the Polycromycon of the monk Ranulf Higden, which was translated from the Latin by Trevisa, and printed by William Caxton in 1482. It is repeatedly quoted in the Cooke Manuscript, whose probable date is the latter part of the fifteenth century, and was undoubtedly familiar to the writers of the other Constitutions.

JAMBLICHUS - IAMBLICHUS

It is strange that the old Freemasons, when inventing their legend, which gave so prominent a place to Pythagoras as "an ancient friend and brother," should have entirely forgotten his biographer, Jamblichus, whose claims to their esteem and veneration are much greater than those of the Samian sage. Jamblichus

was a Neoplatonic philosopher, who was born at Chalcis, in Calo, Syria, and flourished in the fourth century. He was a pupil of Porphyry, and was deeply versed in the philosophic systems of Plato and Pythagoras, and, like the latter, had studied the mystical theology of the Egyptians and Chaldeans whose divine origin and truth he attempts to vindicate.

He maintained that man, through thermic rites and ceremonies, might commune with the Deity; and hence he attached great importance to initiation as the means of inculcating truth. He carried his superstitious veneration for numbers and numerical formula to a far greater extent than did the school of Pythagoras; so that all the principles of his philosophy can be represented by numbers. Thus, he taught that one, or the monad; was the principle of all unity as well as diversity, the duad, or two, was the intellect; three, the soul; four, the principle of universal harmony; eight, the source of motion; nine, perfection; and ten, the result of all the emanations of the to en. It will thus be seen that Jamblichus, while adopting the general theory of numbers that distinguished the Pythagorean school, differed very materially in his explanations. He wrote many philosophical works on the basis of these principles, and was the author of a Life of Pythagoras, and a Treatise of the Mysteries. Of all the ancient philosophers, his system assimilates him most if not in its

details, at least in its spirits to the mystical and symbolic character of the Masonic philosophy.



King Solomon

In writing the life of King Solomon from a Masonic point of view, it is impossible to omit a reference to the legends which have been preserved in the Masonic system.

But the writer, who, with this preliminary notice, embodies them in his sketch of the career of the wise King of Israel, is by no means to be held responsible for a belief in their authenticity. It is the business of the Masonic biographer to relate all that has been handed down by tradition in connection with the life of Solomon; it will be the duty of the severer critic to seek to separate out of all these materials that which is historical from that which is merely mythical, and to assign to the former all that is valuable as fact, and to the latter all that is equally valuable as symbolism.

But it must constantly be kept in mind that the chronology of early Jewish history is obscure. Periods given in the books of Moses are in round numbers and seem based only on tradition. Only when the biblical dates can be checked by external means, as for example by the records of Assyria, may definite dates be accepted with any certainty. Such is the conclusion of the Dictionary of Dates (Nelson's Encyclopedic Library).

Solomon, the King of Israel, the son of [David](#) and Bathsheba, ascended the throne of his kingdom 2989 years after the creation of the world, and 1015 years before the Christian era. He was then only twenty years of age, but the youthful monarch is said to have commenced his reign with the decision of a legal question of some difficulty, in which he exhibited the first promise of that wise judgment for which he was ever afterward distinguished.

One of the great objects of Solomon's life, and the one which most intimately connects him with the history of the Masonic institution, was the erection of a temple to Jehovah. This, too, had been a favorite design of his father David. For this purpose, that monarch, long before his death, had numbered the workmen whom he found in his kingdom; had appointed the overseers of the work, the hewers of stones, and the bearers of burdens; had prepared a great quantity of brass, iron, and cedar; and had amassed an immense treasure with which to support the enterprise.

But on consulting with the Prophet Nathan, he learned from that holy man, that although the pious intention was pleasing to God, yet that he would not be permitted to carry it into execution, and the divine prohibition was proclaimed in these emphatic words: "Thou hast shed blood abundantly, and hast made great wars; thou shalt not build a house unto my name, because thou hast shed much blood upon the earth in my sight." The task was, therefore, reserved for the more peaceful Solomon.

Hence, when David was about to die, he charged Solomon to build the [Temple of God](#) as soon as he should have received the kingdom. He also gave him directions in relation to the construction of the edifice, and put into his possession the money, amounting to ten thousand talents of gold and ten times that amount of

silver, which he had collected and laid aside for defraying the expense. Solomon had scarcely ascended the throne of Israel, when he prepared to carry into execution the pious designs of his predecessor. For this purpose, however, he found it necessary to seek the assistance of [Hiram, King of Tyre](#), the ancient friend and ally of his father.

The Tyrians and Sidonians, the subjects of Hiram, had long been distinguished for their great architectural skill; and, in fact, many of them, as the members of a mystic operative society, the Fraternity of Dionysian Artificers, had long monopolized the profession of building in Asia Minor. The Jews, on the contrary, were rather more eminent for their military valor than for their knowledge of the arts of peace, and hence King Solomon at once conceived the necessity of invoking the aid of these foreign architects, if he expected to complete the edifice he was about to erect, either in a reasonable time or with the splendor and magnificence appropriate to the sacred object for which it was intended. For this purpose he addressed the following letter to King Hiram:

Know thou that my father would have built a temple to God, but was hindered by wars and continual expeditions, for he did not leave off to overthrow his enemies till he made them all subject to tribute. But I give thanks to God for the peace I, at present, enjoy, and on that account I am at leisure, and design to build a house to God. for God foretold to my father, that such a house should be built by me wherefore I desire thee to send some of thy subjects with mine to Mount Lebanon, to cut down timber for the Sidonians are more skillful than our people in cutting of wood. as for wages to the hewers of wood, I will pay whatever price thou shalt determine. Hiram, mindful of the former amity and alliance that had existed between himself and David, was disposed to extend the friendship he had felt for the father to the son, and replied, therefore, to the letter of Solomon in the following epistle:

It is fit to bless God that he hath committed thy father's government to thee, who art a wise man endowed with all virtues.

As for myself, I rejoice at the condition thou art in and will be subservient to thee in all that thou sendest to me about; for when, by my subjects I have cut down many and large trees of cedar and cypress wood, I will send them to sea and will order my subjects to make floats of them. and to sail to what places soever of thy country thou shalt desire and leave them there, after which thy subjects may carry them to Jerusalem. But do thou take care to procure us corn for this timber which we stand in need of, because we inhabit in an island.

Hiram lost no time in fulfilling the promise of assistance which he had thus given; and accordingly we are informed that Solomon received thirty-three thousand six hundred workmen from Tyre, besides a sufficient quantity of timber and stone to construct the edifice which he was about to erect.

Hiram sent him, also, a far more important gift than either men or materials, in the person of an able architect, "a curious and cunning workman," whose skill and experience were to be exercised in superintending the labors of the craft, and in adorning and beautifying the building. Of this personage, whose name was also Hiram, and who plays so important a part in the history of Freemasonry, an account will be found in the article [Hiram Abif](#), to which the reader is referred.

King Solomon commenced the erection of the Temple on Monday, the second day of the Hebrew month Zif, which answers to the twenty-first of April, in the year of the world 2992, and 1012 years before the Christian era. Advised in all the details, as Masonic tradition informs us, by the wise and prudent counsels of Hiram, King of Tyre, and Hiram Abif, who, with himself, constituted at that time the three Grand Masters of the Craft, Solomon made every arrangement in the disposition and government of the workmen, in the payment of their wages, and in the maintenance of concord and harmony which should insure despatch in the execution and success in the result. To Hiram Abif was entrusted the general superintendence of the building, while subordinate stations were assigned to other eminent artists, whose names and offices have been handed down in the traditions of the Order.

In short, the utmost perfection of human wisdom was displayed by this enlightened monarch in the disposition of everything that related to the construction of the stupendous edifice. Men of the most comprehensive minds, imbued with the greatest share of zeal and fervency, and inspired with the strongest fidelity to his interests, were employed as masters to instruct and superintend the workmen; while those who labored in inferior stations were excited to enthusiasm by the promise of promotion and reward. The Temple

was at length finished in the month Bul, answering to our November, in the year of the world 3000, being a little more than seven years from its commencement.

As soon as the magnificent edifice was completed, and fit for the sacred purposes for which it was intended, King Solomon determined to celebrate the consummation of his labors in the most solemn manner.

For this purpose he directed the Ark to be brought from the king's house, where it had been placed by King David, and to be deposited with impressive ceremonies in the holy of holies beneath the expanded wings of the cherubim. This important event is commemorated in the beautiful ritual of the [Most Excellent Master's Degree](#). Our traditions inform us, that when the Temple was completed, Solomon assembled all the heads of the Tribes, the Elders and Chiefs of Israel to bring the Ark up out of [Zion](#), where King David had deposited it in a tabernacle until a more fitting place should have been built for its reception. This duty, therefore, the Levites now performed, and delivered the Ark of the Covenant into the hands of the Priests, who fixed it in its place in the center of the [Holy of Holies](#).

Here the immediate and personal connection of King Solomon with the Craft begins to draw to a conclusion. It is true, that he subsequently employed those worthy Freemasons, whom the traditions say, at the completion and dedication of the Temple, he had received and acknowledged as Most Excellent Masters, in the erection of a magnificent palace and other edifices, but in process of time he fell into the most grievous errors; abandoned the path of truth; encouraged the idolatrous rites of Spurious [Freemasonry](#); and, induced by the persuasions of those foreign wives and concubines whom he had espoused in his later days, he erected a fane for the celebration of these heathen mysteries, on one of the hills that overlooked the very spot where, in his youth, he had consecrated a temple to the one true God.

It is, however, believed that before his death he deeply repented of this temporary aberration from virtue, and in the emphatic expression, "Vanity of vanities! all is vanity" (Ecclesiastes I, 2), he is supposed to have acknowledged that in his own experience he had discovered that falsehood and sensuality, however they may give pleasure for a season, will, in the end, produce the bitter fruits of remorse and sorrow.

That King Solomon was the wisest monarch that swayed the scepter of Israel, has been the unanimous opinion of posterity.

So much was he beyond the age in which he flourished, in the attainments of science, that the Jewish and Arabic writers have attributed to him a thorough knowledge of the secrets of magic, by whose incantations they suppose him to have been capable of calling spirits and demons to his assistance; and the Talmudists and Mohammedan doctors record many fanciful legends of his exploits in controlling these ministers of darkness. As a naturalist, he is said to have written a work on animals of no ordinary character, which has, however, perished; while his qualifications as a poet were demonstrated by more than a thousand poems which he composed, of which his epithalamium on his marriage with an Egyptian princess and the Book of Ecclesiastes alone remain.

He has given us in his Proverbs an Opportunity of forming a favorable opinion of his pretensions to the character of a deep and right-thinking philosopher; while the long peace and prosperous condition of his empire for the greater portion of his reign, the increase of his kingdom in wealth and refinement, and the encouragement which he gave to architectures the mechanic arts, and commerce, testify his profound abilities as a sovereign and statesman- After a reign of forty years he died, and with him expired the glory and the power of the ancient Hebrew Empires.

- Source: Mackey's Encyclopedia of Freemasonry

Prepare By, Br. Florian for the benefit of the Craft, Nov, 2012