

ZERUBBABEL TEMPLE

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INTRODUCTORY.

The enquiring Freemason at an early period of his Masonic career will probably ask several questions about King Solomon's Temple such as these:

- What was its fate?
- Why was it destroyed?
- Was it ever rebuilt? If so, by whom.
- What is on the Temple Site now?

The V.S.L. will supply the answer to all of these questions except the last, but from a purely historical point of view the account of the matter given there is incomplete (even including the Apocrypha), and it also is difficult to follow because it is not arranged in proper chronological order. For further information resort must therefore be had to works of general history and to any literature dealing with the Second Temple which can be found.

Briefly, Palestine was a buffer State between Egypt on the South, and Assyria, Babylon and the other kingdoms, which flourished from time to time in the basin of the River Euphrates, on the North. It formed the bridge between Asia and Africa, the track along which trade routes passed and rival armies marched, according to whether war or peace was the order of the day. Whoever held Palestine held the key to the international situation in the Eastern Mediterranean—a fact which is equally true today.

The geological structure of Palestine itself is no less important. It consists—not of one type of country but of three. The fertile coastal plain, the hills of Judea and Samaria, bisected by the Valley of Esdraelon, and the low-lying country comprising the Dead Sea and the Valley of the Jordan. The coastal plain extends through the Valley of Esdraelon and joins a narrow strip of land leading to the Valley of the Euphrates, the whole being known geographically as the Fertile Crescent.

The fertile coastal plain of Palestine was the route along which the armies marched, but the invading power could not feel sure of its communications or the safety of its transport unless it was in possession of the hills of Judea too. It is this fact which ultimately led to the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of King Solomon's Temple.

Palestine is a small country, no bigger than Wales.

The larger portion of this paper is prepared with the assistance of references from a book by W. S. Caldicott, entitled 'The Second Temple of Jerusalem'. Caldicott is an archaeologist and antiquary with knowledge of architecture and the book is one of a series of four, the other three dealing respectively with the Tabernacle, King Solomon's Temple, and Herod's Temple. Incidentally Caldicott's book is the only book dealing with the Second Temple which is

known to the writer, though of course brief references to it appear in the ordinary works of history.

With regard to the actual dimensions of Zerubbabel's Temple the only information available, apart from the V.S.L. and Josephus, is that contained in Caldicott's book. His method, unfortunately, makes his writings rather difficult to follow, as he bases his plans on Ezekiel's vision, and then works out a probable plan of the Temple from that, taking into account the information actually available regarding Solomon's and Herod's Temples. At the same time one is often in doubt as to whether Caldicott is referring to Ezekiel's Vision or to his own reconstruction, in any particular instance.

His book consists of two parts, first, historical, dealing with the captivity and the return from Babylon, the trials and tribulations of the Jews in the rebuilding of the Temple, and finally carries on the history up to the time of Herod, who built a new Temple in place of Zerubbabel's structure. The second part describes the measurement of the Temple, with a description of the Temple site and compares the First and Second Temple in respect of their measurement and structure.

He commences by pointing out that in 606-5 B.C. a state of active war existed between the two great Powers, Egypt and Babylon, a struggle for supremacy and lordship of the world. Each in turn occupied Jerusalem, as the capital of a buffer and border state.

THE CAPTIVITY.

On the death of his father at the battle of Megiddo, Neco places Jehojakim, the eldest son of Josiah, upon the throne of Judah as Satrapking (viceroy or governor) under the suzerainty of Egypt. Then followed Nebuchadnezzar's victory over the forces of Egypt at the battle of Carchemish. The city of Jerusalem was invested by the Babylonians in all four times.

1. In 606-5 B.C. Prince Nebuchadnezzar, not yet king, with a Babylonian army appeared at the Gates of Jerusalem. This was done as a challenge to Egypt. The gates were opened and Judah now became a province of Babylon. To mark his victory in the battle of Carchemish,

Nebuchadnezzar carried off a portion of the vessels of the Temple and also certain youths of noble and royal blood, who were taken to Babylon and handed over to the master of the eunuchs to be trained as Court attendants and officials. This marks the beginning of the seventy years of captivity.

2. Eight or nine years later Nebuchadnezzar, then in the seventh year of his reign, again appeared before the Walls of Jerusalem. His leniency in dealing with a rebellious subaltern, whose offence was that of refusing the tribute imposed upon him, met with a return peculiarly Jewish. The King, Jehoiakim, was deposed and arrested and, while a prisoner, committed suicide, as all the evidence before us shows. The deficiency in the tribute was taken from the Temple Treasures and sent to Babylon. A Chaldean noble was put in charge of the State in order to collect the taxes which the native rulers professed themselves unable to do. Having placed his Viceroy upon the throne of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar withdrew his army.

3. After an interregnum which the Jewish historians of the day prefer to ignore, Jehoiachin, at eighteen, followed his father on the throne and reigned for three months and ten days, when the army of Babylon reappeared at the gates of the city; Nebuchadnezzar himself arrived after a short interval. The exploitation of the army's return, the defiance of the defenders and the severity that followed can be accounted for only on the supposition of the murder of Nebuchadnezzar's representative. The appearance of Nebuchadnezzar was the signal for an unconditional surrender of the besieged. Seven thousand soldiers, one thousand mechanics and artisans, and two thousand nobles and officials were gathered together in 597 B.C. and deported to Babylon. These figures exceed in number those in any other of the several removals. It was probably at this time Caldicott thinks that the Ark of the Covenant with its precious deposits of the Tables of Stone and the Manuscript Book of Exodus disappeared.

Two of the prisoners of war now taken deserve special notice, though for different reasons. The first was the King's uncle Mattaniab, youngest son of Josiah. He was appointed Viceroy by the King of Babylon and in token of his submission changed his name to Zedekiah. The other was Ezekiel, a priest, twenty-five years of age, who had studied architecture. Ezekiel had lived in Babylon for nearly five years when the spirit of prophecy fell upon him. During that period Zedekiah sat upon the throne in Jerusalem.

Owing to the refusal of Zedekiah to contribute the amount assessed upon him, the army of Babylon marched on Jerusalem for the fourth time. From Egyptian records it is known that Nebuchadnezzar's siege of Jerusalem was interrupted by an army from Egypt marching to its relief.

After the conquest of Egypt the army returned to the siege of Jerusalem. From the first investment to the final capture was a period of eighteen months less one day. The date is 586 B.C. altogether the sieges of Jerusalem cover a period of twenty years.

Caldicott considers that at the time of captivity it is unlikely that the sacred books were burnt. The priests of the Temple almost certainly removed them to Babylon. We must therefore conceive of the Babylonian Jews as being the possessors and guardians of the early writings of Moses and the prophets, which manuscripts had a peculiar value in their eyes from the fact that they were the sole material survivors of the nation's moral greatness and the only permanent memorial of its history.

During the first twelve or thirteen years of captivity we may think of Ezekiel, not only as the head of the party of reform outside the Palace of Babylon but as also elaborately preparing for the return long prophesied. He then prepared amongst other things a set of Temple plans, which, while following in the main those of the Temple of Solomon, removed some inconveniences, and made a more economical use of the site that had before been done.

EZEKIEL'S VISION.

Ezekiel's vision provided the divine sanction to the plans already made of a Temple which was to supersede that designed by David and built by Solomon. In addition to preparing the plans for the Temple, Ezekiel recast such portions of the ancient ritual legislation as were unsuited to the new condition of things, in which Israel was a subject and no longer a free State.

The day on which Ekeziel saw his vision was a day of fasting. Fourteen years after the fall of Jerusalem Ezekiel had probably just completed his drawing of the plans for the new Temple. To him, therefore, it was of importance that there should come some divine attestation by which the people would consent to accept his work in place of that designed by David. The attestation was given 'in a voice' which came to him from out of the Temple, and which bade him, standing beside the altar, show the plan to the House of Israel and let them measure the pattern thereof. He was further to make known to them the form, the fashion, the entrances, and all the ordinances and laws thereof and to write them in their sight, that they might keep them and do them. Here we have the authority upon which Joshua and Zerubabel acted when, a few years later, they built the second Temple after Ezekiel's plan.

The policy pursued by the Kings of Babylon, who carried the Israelites into captivity, was, in Caldicott's opinion, one which was the inevitable outcome of incessant wars and rebellions within their own dominions. The cruel treatment and taxation of captured cities caused continual revolts, and each revolt was punished more severely than its predecessor. To avoid these conditions the Babylonians adopted a policy of exchange of populations. Caldicott estimates the total number of Israelites deported as from 500,000 to a million.

The position of these deported colonists was not that of serfs or slaves. They were free citizens of an old-established kingdom; heavily taxed no doubt, but free to order their lives as they pleased, to go from to place and to engage in any occupation that presented itself.

Upon a decree of general release being issued by Cyrus, many Jews refused to act upon it, and preferred to stay in the land of their exile, now the land of their adoption. A mere fraction of the whole or remnant of the nation elected to return to Palestine. Many acquired riches in Babylon; others, like Daniel, Mordecai, Ezra and Nehemiah rose to positions of wealth and influence.

The long reign of Nebuchadnezzar ended in 561 B.C. and at his death forty-five years of the Captivity had passed, and, when his dynasty closed in blood, fifty years of the Captivity had gone.