

BEZALEEL and AHOLIAB

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According to the book of Exodus, in the Holy Bible, the Lord, speaking unto Moses, said: "make me a sanctuary that I may dwell among you" and, again, "See, I have called by name Bezaleel, the son of Uri" and also "behold, I have given with him Aholiab, the son of Ahisamach". Thus were these two, Bezaleel and Aholiab, introduced into that Book from whence is derived much of our Royal Arch ritual Neither of them, according to the Royal Arch ritual are mentioned more than the one time, thus: 'Moses, assisted by Bezaleel and Aholiab, erected a Tabernacle in the wilderness', but, nevertheless, both were very important units in the making of the whole Masonic structure.

Apparently neither was other than a competent worker in the crafts but, having been chosen by God to assist Moses, both were 'filled with the Spirit of God' which brought out an expertise, wisdom and understanding unknown in those days, or probably since. Many have been the chronicles written about these two artisans and all pay the highest tribute to their skill and ability.

Obviously the Tabernacle, which was to be God's House during the wanderings of the Israelites, had to be something special down to the last detail and these two, Bezaleel and Aholiab, under the guidance of Moses, were the God gifted craftsmen to whom were given the job of designing the Tent, or Tabernacle, erecting and covering the same, making the furniture: the Ark of the Covenant, the Mercy Seat, etc., to a terrifically high standard and in such a manner as would enable the Tabernacle to be dismantled and transported from place to place as required by the Israelites' wanderings.

The description of the Tent or Tabernacle varies from writer to writer but most describe its framework as being of inspired geometric design. It is said, according to Albert Mackey, to have been 45 feet long by 15 feet wide and 15 feet high with a sloping roof. It was placed in the centre of each encampment and surrounded by canvas screens some 7 feet high. It had only one entrance and that was in the eastern side. The Tabernacle was divided into two compartments by a richly decorated curtain hung 15 feet from the western end. Thus was formed in the western end a perfect cube and this was the Holy of Holies, entered only but once a year by the High Priest alone. In the Sanctuary, or eastern end, were placed the Table of Shewbread, the Golden Candlestick and an Altar of Incense and it was decorated with curtains of white, blue, purple and red. It is said that this Tabernacle subsequently became the model for the Tabernacle at King Solomon's Temple.

Bezaleel's role in all this was to make the fullest use of his ability to design the building. As a Tent, as it may be called, it was of such a size and construction that no two men were able to build it. He had therefore to instruct the many others of superior ability who came seeking to have a share in its construction. In respect of his teaching and instruction abilities, apparently Bezaleel had an abundance of talent and many already well qualified tradesman in gold, silver,

brass, wood, stone and cloth, all materials used in the construction of the Tabernacle, became superb craftsmen as a result of his Divine-inspired guidance.

According to the Graham Manuscript he became so famous that among his pupils were two sons of the King Ahoyim who ruled the Country who desired instruction by him in the noble work. To this he agreed conditionally that they undertake an oath never to reveal to anyone any of the secrets he may unfold to them without a third person, possessed of those secrets be with them. To this they agreed and so he instructed them in the crafts which they desired. This curious requirement has become known as "The Tribble Voice" and meant that, upon his death, there remained but these two Princes to whom the secrets had been revealed. As there was no third person present or likely to be present who was in possession of these secrets they were lost. You will all recall a parallel to this situation during the first three degrees in Craft Masonry.

Approaching death, Bezaleel required that he be buried in the Valley of Jehosophat and have erected a headstone such as he deserved and cut thereon the following:

Here lies the Flower of Masonry superior of many other,
Companion to a King and to two Princes,
A brother here lies the heart all secrets could conceal,
Here lies the tongue that never did reveal.

And so the death of Bezaleel resulted in the secrets of the Holy Temple being lost.

Many writers and historians refer to Bezaleel as the Holy One and it would appear that in casting about for a symbol of greatness for our Masonic lore the choice could just as easily have been Bezaleel as Hiram Abif.

About Aholiab, sometimes spelled OHOLIAB and also known by various other appellations there is not a great deal known. Chosen by God to assist Bezaleel and, like Bezaleel, imbued with the 'Spirit of God' to raise his standard of workmanship to the heights of Holy Inspiration, he too was a very capable artificer in cloth, colours, linen, and as an engraver in stone, wood and metals. His particular employment at the building of the Tabernacle was in the manufacturing of the furnishings as these were all made 'on the job' and in this his craftsmanship matched that of Bezaleel. He too was involved in the teaching and instruction of craftsmen who came seeking to play a part in the Holy Work.

Because of this the Tabernacle became a centre of national endeavour, as it became known that all men with adequate skill should contribute to its creation under the supervision of Moses, Bezaleel and Aholiab. The nature of the task required the highest order of craftsmanship as the Tabernacle was to be a place of worship, containing the Ark of the Covenant, the place where God would dwell with His people. It would become the centre of religious life and nationality for the Israelites their most important and revered object. At the

completion of this project Aholiab appears to have dropped from prominence whereas Bezaleel carried on with his work for some years.

However, neither has been entirely forgotten, even today. Their memory is perpetuated in English Royal Arch tradition as follows:

It is written that prior to commencing the building of the Tabernacle a Meeting or Lodge was opened at the encampment presided over by Moses, as Master and Bezaleel and Aholiab as Wardens. This is referred to as the 'Holy Lodge' and is further referred to in the following ritual in the refectory of some English chapters, after Grace:

With the Companions seated and before any toasts:

Zerubbabel, to Sojourner: How many original Grand Lodges do we commemorate?

Sojourner: Three, Most Excellent.

Zerubbabel: Name them.

Sojourner: The First, or Holy Lodge; the Second or Sacred Lodge; and the Third or Grand and Royal Lodge.

Zerubbabel: Where was the First or Holy Lodge holden?

Sojourner: At the foot of Mount Horeb in the Wilderness of Sinai.

Zerubbabel: Who presided?

Sojourner: Moses, Aholiab and Bezaleel.

According to the Freemasons' Royal Arch Guide the last of the answers mentioned was given thus: Moses the meek Aholiab the quiet and Bezaleel the architect.

Only the finest in craftsmanship would fulfil the requirements for this exacting task. God endowed Bezaleel and Aholiab with superior skill and wisdom for the fulfilment of their task. They did their job well.

In the dramas of the Masonic degrees, Aholiab's role and that of Bezaleel, exemplify the truth that the greatest reward of the craftsman is the approval of his own conscience, and that labour, dignified and enhanced by light and love, is the true worship of God. The union of labour, light and love reveals the essence of Freemasonry.