

A Tale of Two Pillars

King Solomon's Temple is an essential part of our Masonic tradition and ritual. One of its more interesting features are the pillars on the porch leading to the Middle Chamber. We are given most of our information about them in the Fellowcraft Degree, and you can find more details about them in the books 1 Kings and 2 Chronicles of the Old Testament. Here is a quick summary of some of their characteristics. There were two pillars, one called Boaz and the other was named Jachin, each was 35 cubits tall with ornamental Chapiters and spheres or globes on their tops. They were hollow and made of cast brass by the Master Craftsman Hiram Abiff, who came from Tyre.

These were large and ornate, requiring a lot of skill and material to construct. They were freestanding and not a structural part of the temple. Why were they given those names and what was their reason for being built and displayed in the Temple?

Let's start with their names. There is an old tradition that says one was a kingly pillar and the other a priestly pillar and this might be true as one pillar was topped by a globe representing the earth, for the king, and the other one had a sphere representing the heavens, which would be for the priest. During official ceremonies, the King stood before one of them and the High Priest would stand in front of the other. Now, Boaz makes some sense as the name of the kingly pillar, as there was a man named Boaz who was the great-great-grandfather of King Solomon. Unfortunately, there is much less information about the name Jachin, but as the name for the priestly pillar this may be its origin: there is believed to be a priest by that name in the line of Aaron, Moses' brother, and the founder of the lineage of all of the Israelite priests. There must be some information lost to history as to why these two great pillars were named after a great-great-grandfather and a somewhat obscure priest, who was not even the High Priest. Even though we can find a source for the names, the reason for their use remains a mystery.

What was their purpose. Certainly they were grand, beautiful, and impressive monuments and would thus show off King Solomon's wealth. Some claim that they were there to represent the two pillars which led the Jews through the desert on their exodus

from Egypt; the Pillar of Smoke by day and the Pillar of Fire by night. Our Ritual Book gives another clue as to at least a part of their purpose. *“These Pillars were hollow to serve as safe repositories for the records as Archives of Freemasonry against Inundation and Conflagration.”* It may seem a strange thing to us to use pillars as a safe place to store information against fire and water, but there is some precedence for this and this is also what I believe may be the real reason for them being in King Solomon’s Temple.

In order to explain my theory for the reason that the two pillars were in the Temple, we will need to take a little detour through ancient Masonic history and lore.

Most of what we know about the history of Freemasonry before the formation of the Premier Grand Lodge of 1717 comes to us in the form of ancient manuscripts. There are over 70 of these old scrolls and folios, dating as far back as the late 1300’s and early 1400’s. There are two interesting facts common to almost all of them. First, they are all copies of even older documents – no original source documents have yet been found but there is little doubt that these sources go back well before the 1300’s. The second is that they pretty much all contain a similar and very peculiar history of the origin of our Craft. It is this strange history that I believe explains the pillars. Here is a quote from the Haddon Manuscript, which is very representative of this same story of the founding of Freemasonry that is contained in these ancient manuscripts

“How that this worthy science was first begun, I shall tell you: Before Noah’s flood there was a man that was called Lamech, it is written in the bible, in the 4th chapter of Genesis, and this Lamech had two wives, and the one wife’s name was Adah, and the other Zillah: By the first he had two sons, and the one was called Jabal, and the other Jubal; and by the other wife Zillah, he got a son and a daughter, and these four children founded the beginning of all the sciences in the world. And the elder son Jabal founded the science of Geometry, and he departed flocks of sheep, and land in the field, and first wrought houses of stone and timber, as it is noted in the chapter aforesaid. And his brother Jubal found the science of Music, as song, harp and organ: and the third brother Tubal-Cain found smith’s craft of gold silver copper iron and steel, and the daughter found the craft or knowledge of weaving, and these children knew well that God would

take vengeance for sin, either by fire or water, wherefore they wrote their sciences that they had found in two pillars of stone that they might be found out after Noah's flood. And the one pillar of stone was marble, for that would not be burnt with fire. And the stones whereof the other pillar made was called Laterns, and that would not drown in any water."

"Our intent is to tell you truly how and in what manner these stones were found, that these sciences were written in. The great Hermermes that was the son of Cub who was the son of Shem, who was the son of Noah. The same Hermermes was afterwards called Hermes the father of the wise men, he found out the two pillars of stone and found the sciences written there and he taught it to other men:"

Here we have a reason for the two pillars and their use as a repository for safe guarding information against flood and fire. As this legend is very very old, it could well be that King Solomon and the people of his time also knew of it. What better way would there have been for him to associate himself with Hermes, the father of the wise men, and symbolize having access to the knowledge of the seven liberal arts and sciences.

One last point, why were King Solomon's pillars made of metal, not stone, like the originals he was trying to symbolize? My answer to this is "power", as in, a show of power. The Temple was constructed of wood and stone, both common materials, to make the pillars stand out and show off his wealth and power, the pillars had to be special. Such massive castings, using so much metal each would surly have done the trick.

It is my belief that King Solomon had the two pillars, Boaz and Jachin, erected in his temple, not for structural purposes, but to symbolize his connection to the father of the wise men and his access to the knowledge of the seven liberal arts and sciences. Remember, during ceremonies in the Temple he would stand immediately in front of the kingly pillar, directly associating himself with it and the wisdom and knowledge that it symbolized.

Bro. Hans Erdmann
Woodstock Lodge #11
February 7, 2019