

A MASONIC VIEW OF THE ARK OF THE COVENANT

The purpose of this paper is to view the Ark of the Covenant and its contents, from a Masonic perspective and how these could be interpreted in our rituals.

After praying to God on Mount Sinai, Moses came down with two stone tablets on which were delineated the laws that God had communicated to him which were to be obeyed by the people. These are now called the Ten Commandments. He directed the Israelites to construct a chest to contain these tablets, now known as The Ark of the Covenant.

Let us first take a look at the Ark itself. It was constructed of acacia wood and clad both outside and inside of pure gold. In the centre of the lid was a seat, often referred to as the 'Judgement Seat' or the 'Seat of Testimony'.

Facing inwards on either side of the seat were two-winged cherubim. The Ark measured two and a half cubits long by one and a half cubits wide and one and a half cubits high. Taking this to be a Hebrew cubit, which is eighteen inches rather than an Egyptian cubit, which is about twenty inches, the size of the Ark can be calculated to be three feet and nine inches long, by two feet and three inches in both height and width. Hoops were fitted in each of the four corners of the base, so that poles could be inserted to facilitate the transportation of the Ark. Where the Israelites journeyed so, did the laws of God.

The first connection in Masonry with reference to the Ark, are the materials used in its construction: acacia wood and gold. In Masonry, acacia wood symbolises

integrity and gold purity. Let us surmise this to be a Masons heart and in the First Degree the candidate receives the Charge after Initiation, where his attention is directed to the Volume of the Sacred Law, charging him to consider it as the unerring standard of truth and justice. This will be placed in his heart as he prepares to proceed on his Masonic journey. Let us look to the working tools in the First Degree of Freemasonry, which are tools of preparation.

The next item with a connection to the Ark is a jar or pot of manna. What is manna? Quite simply, corn. How could one small jar of corn feed the multitude you may ask. Surely this must be symbolic! We sow the corn and when it has grown, reap the harvest, take the seeds from the ears of the corn and replant and repeat the process, so in time, during the development of this process there will be a time of plenty. The connection of this to Masonry can be made when the candidate receives the password leading from the first to the Second Degree which is "Shibboleth" and is depicted in our Lodges by an ear of corn near to a fall of water. The import of the word is 'Plenty'.

The Second-Degree Tracing Board makes reference to two rows of pomegranate seeds on each of the chapiters on the pillars at the porchway or entrance to King Solomon's Temple. This exuberance of the pomegranate seeds, combined with the plentiful corn; in Masonry, can be considered to mean creating and developing plenty of great spiritual growth

Again, if we look at the working tools in the Second Degree, they are also tools used to 'create'. It is worthy to note that a Mason may say he has completed his Second Degree. He would be quite wrong as no Mason has ever "completed" his Second Degree. He would be more correct in saying that he has been passed to the Second

Degree, where spiritual growth is ongoing throughout his life.

The last item associated with the Ark is the Budded rod of Aaron. Aaron was the brother of Moses and both were of the tribe of Levi. The other princes or rulers of the twelve tribes were in rebellion, saying that Aaron had too much authority. On God's instruction, Moses took twelve staffs or rods of almond wood and engraved each of their names on their respective almond rod. He placed the twelve rods in the Tent of Testimony and when they went to view the rods the next day, they found the rod with Aaron's name on it had borne both fruit and flowers. Aaron's authority was not questioned again. In biblical times a rod was used for supervision as a shepherd would guide or supervise his flock and as a symbol of authority by princes and rulers to supervise their people. The working tools in this degree are of supervision

Two references to a rod can be identified in Masonry.

In the Holy Royal Arch, the three Principals bear sceptres to mark their authority with which to supervise the Chapter. In the Craft ceremony of Raising, the budded rod of Aaron, which was the dead almond wood staff that came to life, could represent the whole message in the ceremony of raising, which is life after death. When we have journeyed through our mortal life, we will have to sit in judgement and give testimony of our life and actions in the hope of ascending to those immortal mansions in the heavens. The connection to this is made by looking to the judgement seat on the Ark and the two, winged Cherubim which we hope will deliver us to our destination.

From the beginning of time, signs and objects have had a symbolic meaning. The beehive, symbolises industry; the anchor, hope and the dove, peace to name but a few. On this basis I find it quite plausible that the Ark and its contents could be symbolic and its interpretations could have a relative bearing to Masonry.

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