

Copyright of this publication is vested in The Hawke's Bay Research Lodge and the author, and anyone wishing to reproduce it in full or in part should first obtain permission from the Lodge Secretary.

## **Hawke's Bay Research Lodge No. 305**

### **The Pillars**

**An Address given by WBro Richard Bray, PGBB,  
Past Master of the Lodge  
At the 1st May, 2006 Meeting**

Brethren,

My talk tonight is on the pillars. What are they? Where were they placed? How did they get their names? Most, if not all of you, think that you know the answer to these questions, but be prepared for a couple of surprises.

We also have other pillars, although we call them columns, as in the tracing boards and on the wardens' pedestals. I have often wondered why the Master doesn't have one. This could be a good subject for some one to look into.

But, let's get back to the talk in hand, The Pillars. If I may, let's go back to King Solomon's Temple and the work and preparation that went into this huge structure. King Solomon commenced construction of the temple in the fourth year of his reign and completed it seven years later, about 950 BC. To facilitate the work he entered into a treaty with Hiram, King of Tyre, whereby Hiram would permit Solomon to obtain cedar and cypress wood and blocks of stone from Lebanon. Furthermore, Solomon's workmen would be permitted to fell the timber and to quarry and hew the stones under the direction of Hiram's skilled workmen. In addition, Solomon was provided with the services of a skilful Tyrian artisan, named Hiram, to take charge of the castings and of the manufacture of the more valuable furniture and furnishings of the temple.

In return for all of the services to be provided by Hiram, Solomon agreed to send to him every year, 4,400,000 litres of crushed wheat and 4,400,000 litres of barley, as well as 440,000 litres of wine and 440,000 litres of oil. Solomon raised a levy of forced labour out of all Israel, totalling thirty thousand men, which he sent to Lebanon in relays of ten thousand a month.

Adoniram, who had been an officer of King David in charge of labour gangs, continued under King Solomon and was placed in charge of the levy working in Lebanon. King Solomon also employed seventy thousand burden bearers and eighty thousand hewers of stone in the hill country, as well as thirty-three hundred officers in charge of the people who carried out the work. Some thirty years after the completion of the temple, when Rehoboam sent Adoniram to enforce the collection of taxes, the exasperated populace rebelled and stoned Adoniram to death.

The Temple of Solomon was a prefabricated building oriented due east-west, being constructed of accurately shaped blocks of limestone quarried and dressed in or near Jerusalem and assembled without mortar. The temple had a single entrance at the eastern end, accessed through an uncovered porch. The porch, called the "ulam", was ten cubits in length along the axis of the temple and twenty cubits wide. Looking east from inside, it was fronted by two great pillars or columns, that on the right or south side being called "J...n" and that on the left or north side being called "B..z". All of the timber used in the temple came from the forests of Lebanon. The temple had olive wood doors and was lined with cedar wood, ornately carved and inlaid with gold. The compartments of the tabernacle were replicated in King Solomon's Temple, but they were twice as large. The porch, which gave entrance into the "hekhal", or Holy Place, was forty cubits long, twenty cubits wide and thirty cubits high and was lit by latticed windows near the ceiling. This hall was accessible only to priests and was used for daily worship, for religious ritual and for the presentation of offerings. At the western end of the building was the "debir", or Holy of Holies. It was a perfect cube of twenty cubits, set on a

podium to maintain the same ceiling line as in the Holy Place. There were no windows in the Holy of Holies, which received its light only through the doorway from the Holy Place when the curtains were open. The Holy of Holies was accessible only to the high priest, probably only once a year for the atonement ceremony.

The temple was surrounded on the north, west and south by store chambers, three stories high. Among these, on the southern side, was the "middle chamber" to which access was gained by a winding stair in the south-east corner of the building. The whole structure was on a platform about two metres higher than the upper or inner court that surrounded it, requiring ten steps to ascend. This inner court was raised above the surrounding great or outer court, which required eight steps to ascend. The outer court also was raised above the surroundings, requiring another seven steps to ascend. Each of these courts was enclosed by walls comprising three rows of hewn stone, surmounted by a row of cedar beams. In the upper or inner court, as in the court of the tabernacle, there was a brazen altar for burnt offering, a brazen sea and ten brazen layers for use by the priests in their ablutions and for ceremonial purification.

Although smaller than any Egyptian temple, the Temple of Solomon was a magnificent edifice surpassing any that had preceded it, being noted for the lavish beauty of its detail and opulence of its furnishings, rather than for its size. No stonework was visible inside, because the compartments were ceiled and panelled with cedar wood and the floors were planked with cypress. Access to the Holy Place was through double folding doors of cypress wood, each divided into upper and lower sections. The Holy of Holies was separated from the Holy Place by double doors of olive wood. Both sets of doors were usually left open, but they were screened with veils similar in ornamentation to those in the tabernacle. The walls and doors were carved with palm trees, garlands, opening flowers and cherubim, richly inlaid with gold. The ceiling and floor of the Holy Place, as well as the whole of the interior of the Holy of Holies, were overlaid with gold plate.

The furnishings of the Holy Place included an altar of incense, ten "menorah" or golden seven-branched lamp stands, often called lamp sticks; also twelve tables for the loaves of shew bread. Within the Holy of Holies there were two cherubim, ten cubits high, carved from olive wood and overlaid with gold, symbolising the majestic presence of God. Modern research shows that the cherubim would have been winged sphinxes, each with the body of a lion and a human head. This hybrid was extremely common in the iconography of western Asia between 1800 BC and 600 BC. The cherubim stood in a brooding attitude with outstretched wings, their adjacent wing tips touching above the Ark of the Covenant that rested in the middle of the apartment, while the tip of each other wing touched the north and south walls respectively. The Ark of the Covenant was made of shittim or acacia wood, overlaid with pure gold within and without. It contained the two tables of stone on which was engraved the "ten commandments", the terms of God's covenant with Israel.

The two great pillars at the porch or entrance to King Solomon's Temple were hollow and cast of bronze, eighteen cubits high, twelve cubits in circumference and four fingers thick. They were surmounted by double capitals that were five cubits in their combined height, but probably cast in two separate parts. The lower part, or chapter, was of lotus work comprising four open and everted petals each four cubits wide. The upper part, or capital, was a bowl, not a sphere as is often said. The hollow columns were cast by the Tyrrians in moulds dug in the ground, using the "lost wax" method developed by the Assyrians in the Bronze Age, probably around 1200 BC. In this method the mould is formed round a wax core which melts away during casting. With large castings like the pillars, the wax core is formed round a sand or earth core. Such columns were common in Syria, Phoenicia and Cyprus at that time and the Tyrians were very experienced in this method of casting.

Modern research indicates that the upper bowl probably was a vessel to contain oil, which could be lit at night. Similar decorated pillars are known to have been used at shrines in Palestine and Cyprus, during the period 1000 BC to 900 BC. The Greek historian Herodotus, writing around 450 BC, described two large pillars near the temple of Hercules at Tyre which "shone at night". Like the Phoenician models, the two immense incense stands at the porch of King Solomon's Temple would have illuminated the facade of the temple on Mount Moriah at night, whilst also catching the first

glint of the Jerusalem sunrise. They have been interpreted as sacred obelisks, their blazing smoking wicks recalling to worshippers the pillars of fire and cloud that led the Israelites of old through the wilderness.

The pillars were completed and named before the temple was dedicated. Although it has often been said that the names of the pillars were to enshrine the memory of David's ancestry, it is now known that this was not their interpretation. It has been shown convincingly that the names of the two great pillars inscribed on the columns stood for the initial, or key words, spoken by oracles. In seeking to give power to the Davidic dynasty, as well as to express King Solomon's gratitude to the Almighty, the oracles probably used invocations such as: "Yahweh will establish thy throne forever" and "The king's strength is in Yahweh". The bowls were not representations of the then known terrestrial and celestial globes, nor did the pillars serve as archives for the constitutional rolls, as is often suggested.

**Addendum:**

In the accompanying diagram of King Solomon's Temple please note the positions of the porch (4) and the two pillars, Jachin (5) and Boaz (6). *That on the left is Boaz* – that is, on the left looking out from the porch.

