

## KING SOLOMON'S TEMPLE AND ITS MASONIC SIGNIFICANCE

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### Introduction

Our newly initiated brother hears a piece of our ritual stating "... *at the building of King Solomon's Temple (for it is upon the circumstances attending the erection of that edifice that our ceremonial is chiefly based)*..."<sup>1</sup>. Details of King Solomon's Temple (KST) are revealed in the First and Second Degree tracing boards and then the story culminates in the Hiramic Legend of the Third Degree. This whole intermeshing of portions of ritual related to the Temple and its' construction is intended to serve one purpose, to enhance the morality of the Masonic listener - the making "good men better". However, it is debateable if many Freemasons truly understand the symbolic significance of what they hear time and again in their Lodge.

Man, in his various societal units, has always felt a need to understand and explain where he came from. At a racial level there are the creation myths, which explain the origin of the universe and man. Many North American Indian tribes are refusing to participate in gene mapping projects because they will, among other things, destroy their creation myths.<sup>2</sup> At a national level we see foundation statements held, almost, in reverence *e.g.* the US Declaration of Independence, the *Magna Carta* and the Treaty of Waitangi. Even at an individual level great import is placed on our genealogy as seen in the Maori oral *whakapapa* or the English trend of creating family links by creating hyphenated names *e.g.* Smythington-Jones. The early legends of masonry, and later Freemasonry, have followed the same route. In the early part of the second millennium there was effectively only one book available to non-scholars – the Holy Bible. Although the early masons would have been effectively illiterate their association with the clergy would have made them well aware of the Old Testament story of King Solomon's Temple. It would be the Masonic writers of the 1700's who would attempt to extend the origins back to the pyramids of Egypt.

Every Freemason understands, or should understand, that the Masonic legend of the construction of King Solomon's Temple differs from that found in the King James Version of the Bible. At this point it is worth commenting that there exists very little physical evidence that the Temple *actually existed*. What evidence does exist will be discussed later in this paper.

### Biblical References

What we know of the construction and physical dimensions of the Temple come from the Books of Kings and Chronicles. The biblical story differs from that of the Masonic account; for example, defining whom the chief architect of the Temple truly was;

*Then David gave to Solomon, his son, the pattern of the porch and of the houses thereof, and of the treasuries thereof, and of the upper chambers thereof, and of the inner parlours thereof, and of the place of the mercy seat.*

*I Chronicles 28:11*

*All this, said David, the Lord made to understand in writing, by his hand upon me, even all the works of this pattern.*

*I Chronicles 28: 19*

*And David said to Solomon his son, be strong and of good courage, and do it.*

*I Chronicles 28: 20*

While our legend has numerous masons happily going about their work on the Temple, the biblical account of King Solomon's recruitment strategy is somewhat different:

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<sup>1</sup> GLNZ *The Ritual of the Three Degrees of Freemasonry*, 2004 Reprint, Wellington, p69

<sup>2</sup> The National Congress of American Indians, *Resolution REN-08-030*, 2008 at <http://www.ncai.org/ncai/resolutions/doc/REN-08-030.pdf>

*King Solomon took a census and numbered all the foreigners that were in the land of Israel and they found 153,600. He set 70 000 of them to bear burdens, 80,000 to be hewers in the mountains and 3,600 overseers to set the people at work.*

*2 Chronicles 2: 17, 18*

*King Solomon raised a levy out of all Israel, and the, levy was 30,000 men. And he sent them to Lebanon, 10,000 a month by turns, one month they were in Lebanon and two months at home. Adoniram was over the men subject to task work.*

*1 Kings 5: 13, 14*

The sole purpose of the above biblical references is to reinforce the fact that the biblical and Masonic stories are significantly different. It is also very difficult to get a concrete idea of what the Temple actually looked like. Even today we see the Two Great Pillars represented in our lodges topped by globes – sometimes even terrestrial and celestial globes. Perhaps Bro Jerome Frisbee gave one of the best graphic interpretations of the actual structure of the building and its environs in his 1920 publication of the pamphlet “King Solomon’s Temple.”<sup>3</sup> In the second part of the pamphlet, Bro Frisbee makes some rather dubious statements regarding the significance of the dimensions of the Temple based on his own interpretation of the length of a cubit. He states that the cubit was 25 inches long, but;

- The *Egyptian Royal Cubit* was 523.5 to 524 mm (20.61 to 20.63 inches)
- The *Sumerian cubit* was about 518.5 mm (20.4 inches)
- The *Greek kyrenaika cubit* measured about 463.1 mm
- The *Hashimi cubit* of about 650.2 mm (25.6 inches)
- The *Mesopotamian cubit* measured about 533.4 mm.
- The *Babylonian cubit* measured about 496.1 mm.
- In *Ancient Israel* during the First Temple period, the cubit was 428.1 mm (16.85 in.)

In the graphics contained in the Appendices, in those where a human figure is included for scale, it is suggested you reduce the structure by 33%. Bro Frisbee does however take license in his pictorial representation of the Temple. In Appendix 5.4 he portrays a series of nine arched vaults underneath the western end of the temple. Bro Clarke, no doubt a Scottish Rite Freemason and familiar with the 13<sup>th</sup> degree, the Royal Arch of Enoch, is suggesting the existence of the nine catenarian arched vaults<sup>4</sup> in the time of King Solomon needs to be treated with scepticism<sup>5</sup>; the first reference to the use of arched vaults is credited to the Etruscans, two or three centuries after the period of KST and catenarian arches first appear in the archaeological record in the middle ages. This is also acknowledged in the research transactions of the Supreme Grand Royal Arch Chapter of Queensland.<sup>6</sup>

Hiram, King of Tyre, a long time supporter of King David (*1 Kings 5: 1*) did provide men, cedar and fir, *at a price*. In the biblical account in *1 Kings* the bulk of the Temple is complete (*1 Kings 5: 14*) before Solomon fetches the widow’s son, Hiram, out of Tyre (*1 Kings 7: 13*). While some biblical references credit Hiram of Tyre as being skilled only in the working of brass we also find much of the decorative work in gold and other metals credited to Hiram (*1 Kings 7: 49*).

To conclude, the biblical building team looked like this:

- Architect and Finance – King David
- Project Manager – King Solomon
- Logistics Manager - Hiram of Tyre
- Pre-fabrication Manager - Adoniram
- Fittings Manager – Hiram of Naphtali

In the three Craft Degrees heavy emphasis is placed on the role of Hiram of Naphtali whom we know as Hiram Abif. In another Masonic ceremony the important role of Adoniram is also recognized.

All Freemasons are aware of the two great pillars, which stood at the entrance to the temple, their names and the meaning of those names. It is here perhaps that the early authors of the Masonic legend missed an opportunity to reinforce the moral value of fidelity. Solomon did not simply erect the pillars as ornaments to the Temple, but as memorials of God’s repeated promises of support to his people of Israel. For the pillar

<sup>3</sup> See [http://www.phoenixmasonry.org/king\\_solomons\\_temple/table\\_of\\_contents.htm](http://www.phoenixmasonry.org/king_solomons_temple/table_of_contents.htm)

<sup>4</sup> Refer to the Book of Enoch and or the Royal Arch of Enoch degree of the A&AR

<sup>5</sup> Clarke JR *Some Early Royal Arch Rituals*, Ars Quatuor Coronatorum, Vol93, London (1981), p186.

<sup>6</sup> Jeffrey R *Some aspects of our ritual*, Supreme Grand Royal Arch Chapter of Queensland, RA R009 (1985), p1,

*Jachin*, derived from the words, *Jah*, meaning *Jehovah*, and *achin*, to *establish*, signifies that *God will establish His house of Israel*; while the pillar *Boaz*, compounded of *b*, meaning *in* and *oaz*, meaning *strength*, signifies that *in strength shall it be established*.

In fact, the message in full is given in 1 Kings 5:5,6,7:

*5. Then I will establish the throne of thy kingdom upon Israel for ever, as I promised to David thy father, saying, There shall not fail thee a man upon the throne of Israel.*

*6. But if ye shall at all turn from following me, ye, or your children, and will not keep my commandments and my statutes which I have set before you, but go and serve other gods and worship them;*

*7. Then I will cut off Israel out of the land which I have given them; and this house, which I have hallowed for my name, will I cast out of my sight; and Israel will be a proverb and a byword among all people.*

Thus, the Jews, in passing through the porch to the Temple, were reminded daily of the abundant promises of God, and inspired with confidence in his protection and gratitude for his many acts of kindness to his chosen people.

The corollary was that they needed to remain true to their God and scripture informs us that this, they failed to do. The result was that the House of David and the temple were to be sacked many times over the next half millennium:

- By king Shishak of Egypt, c.933 BCE (1 Kings 14:25, 26);
- By king Asa of Judah, c.900 BCE in order to persuade Ben-Hadad I of Damascus to come to his aid against Baasha of Israel (1 Kings 15:9-24);
- By king Jehoash of Judah, c. 825 BCE, in order to pay Hazael of Damascus, who was besieging the city (2 Kings 12:17-18);
- By king Jonahs of Israel, c.790 BCE (2 Kings 14:14);
- By king Ahaz of Judah, 734 BCE, to persuade Tiglath-pileser III of Assyria to come to his aid against Peak of Israel and Rezin II of Damascus (2 Kings 16:8, 17, 18);
- By king Hezekiah of Judah, 712 BCE, to pay king Sennacherib of Assyria, who was besieging the city (2 Kings 18:15, 16)
- By king Nebuchadnezzar II of Babylon who pillaged it twice- once in 597 BCE, and again in 586 BCE, after which he destroyed it (2 Kings 24:13; 2 Chr. 36:7). He burned the temple, and carried all its treasures with him to Babylon (2 Kings 25:9-17; 2 Chr. 36:19; Isaiah 64:11).

## **The Archaeological Evidence**

Israeli archaeologist Eilat Mazar has conjectured that archaeological evidence supports the historical existence of Solomon's Temple. This includes remains taken from refuse from an extensive construction project performed on the Temple Mount by the Islamic Waqf in November 1999.<sup>7</sup> The second was discovered in the summer of 2007, as archaeologists overseeing construction at the site reported “evidence of human activity” most likely belonging to the first temple period.<sup>8</sup>

There is also an extensive quarry system under Jerusalem from which much of the stone, particularly for the fill needed in the Tyropean Valley (see Appendix 5.7), could have been obtained. This subterranean quarry is known as Zedekiah's Caves (see Appendix 5.7). The entrance to Zedekiah's Cave is just beneath the Old City wall, between the Damascus and Herod Gates, about 500 feet (150 m) east of the former. Beyond the narrow entrance, the cave slopes down into a vast 300-foot-long auditorium-like chamber. Drops of water, known as “Zedekiah's tears”, trickle through the ceiling.

Beyond the “auditorium”, are a series of artificial galleries hewn by ancient stonecutters into chaotic (sometimes bizarre) patterns and formations. Paths give access to every corner of the quarry system, which takes at least thirty minutes to explore thoroughly. Chisel marks are visible in many sections and in some galleries huge, nearly finished building blocks destined for some long-ago structure are locked into the rock where the stonecutters left them centuries ago. In a few places the stones are marked by Arabic, Greek,

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<sup>7</sup> “Exclusive: Dumped Temple Mount Rubble Yields Jewish Artifacts” - Jewish World - Israel News - Arutz Sheva May 15, 1999

<sup>8</sup> “Solomon's Temple Artefacts Found by Muslim Workers”, National Geographic News, May 14, 2009

Armenian and English charcoal and engraved graffiti (e.g., "W. E. Blackstone Jan. 1889"). Several plaques explaining some of the myriad legends associated with the site have been mounted on the cave walls.

Note however that other quarries have been identified in Jerusalem, including one claimed to have been used by Herod's men to build the Second Temple. The rock appears as a soft marble-like material, which is easy to work in its native state but hardens on exposure to air over time.

And finally, in a city to the northeast of Jerusalem a ruined gate was found that matches the biblical description of the east gate of King Solomon's Temple. It may well be that either the architecture of the Temple found its way into Tyre or that further building was conducted by the same building team as further payment to the King of Tyre.

Does it matter to us as Freemasons whether the Temple actually existed or not? The answer is a resounding NO!

## **Freemasonic Temple Builders**

King David enjoined his son Solomon to build a temple to the glory of Yahweh made of stone, fir and cedar adorned and beautified with brass, silver and gold. Freemasonry enjoins us as Freemasons to build a temple to the glory of T.G.A.O.T.U. made of our morality and behaviour. Thus the biblical account of the Temple serves as a template for the Masonic plans provided to us to build our temple.

From the moment we irrevocably commit ourselves to Freemasonry by sealing our First Degree obligation we are on the building journey. Immediately we are provided with an apprentice's apron and put to work creating the cornerstone of our temple with a demonstration of charity, albeit frustrated. We are told clearly that we are expected to persevere with the building – "... may you raise a superstructure perfect in its parts, and honourable to the builder". From here we are instructed in the use of the basic Masonic tools, not the tools of building or design but as befitting a neophyte, the basic tools of "stone squaring".

As we progress through the degrees, each moral lesson imparted is in fact another tool or raw material that we use in building our personal spiritual and moral temple. The working tools of the Second Degree are those of the builder and of the Third, the designer or architect. Note that by the completion of the Second Degree the Fellowcraft has had all of the construction lessons and tools provided but he is enjoined to make the liberal arts and sciences, the attributes of the architect, his area of future study. Rather fortuitous considering what will happen in the Third Degree and it is in this degree that the greatest Masonic confusion arises.

In the Hiramic legend the death of Hiram Abif has led some, often senior, Freemasons to claim that the Third Degree, by the loss of the secrets, is incomplete. Nothing could be further from the truth. This writer agrees with Alexander Lawrie who, in his *History of Freemasonry* (1859) held that the Craft Degrees are complete in themselves, and that the 'lost secrets' can only be found "beyond the veil of time".<sup>9</sup>

By 1730, when Prichard's *Masonry Dissected* was published, the three-degree system had become firmly established. The firm establishment of the Hiramic legend in Freemasonry dates from the same period, as proven by the advertisement for sale in 1726 of a publication entitled "*The Whole History of the Widow's Son Killed by the Blow of a Beetle*".<sup>10</sup>

Note that in our legend, the loss of the input from Hiram Abif caused problems but did not prevent the completion of the temple. Remember the Hiramic legend is a legend, created in the early days of ritual development. Do you seriously believe that the legend creators deliberately set out to create an incomplete legend? They didn't, but they were extremely clever in the manner in which they hid the completion.

So here we are. We have diligently passed through two degrees learning the lessons of firstly moral truth and secondly intellectual truth and now find that the ultimate secrets that we were to use to adorn and beautify our moral and spiritual temple have been lost to us by the death of our Grand Master. It seems that all is lost, but this is not so.

Firstly, let us explore where he is buried. Next time you are alone in the lodge take up a position upon the centre of the pavement. "From the Centre three feet East, three feet West, three feet between North and

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<sup>9</sup> Jones B E, *Freemasons Book of the Royal Arch*, Harrap, London (1957), p26

<sup>10</sup> Jones B E, *Freemason's Guide and Compendium*, Harrap, London, (1950), p318

South and five feet or more perpendicular”<sup>11</sup>. Note that it says “perpendicular” not “down”. Centralise those parameters and you will be pointing to yourself as the final resting place of Hiram Abif.

Going back to the working tools of the First Degree we are told that “labour is the lot of man” – so if we can’t have the secrets given to us then we need to follow Hiram’s advice when he told each ruffian in the Alternative Third “these secrets will be given to you if found worthy”. We need to learn to use the tools given to us and build our temple learning as we go. The question that arises is where are the plans, how do we know what we have to build?

We are further confused by the ritual mention of the “substitute secrets” embodied in two words: in truth the “substituted secrets are not the words but the whole of the three degrees. The adage “the King is dead, long live the King” applies here but with reference to “The Builder”. The Temple Architect is dead so we become the Temple Architect.

The answer to the question above, “how?” is cunningly concealed in the First Degree. As the candidate receives physical light, the *greatest* light in Freemasonry is immediately before him but not one in a million will see it. Indeed, the Master immediately draws the candidate’s attention away as he reveals the *Three Great Lights*. What better place to hide the *Greatest Light In Freemasonry* than right under our nose? It was concealed even further by the Ritual Revision Committee of 1934. In the opening of the Third Degree in the 1903 Ritual the following appears:

W.M. “Where do you hope to find them?”

S.W. “Upon the Centre”

In the 1934 Ritual this has been changed to:

W.M. “How do you hope to find them?”

S.W. “With the Centre”

It is difficult to discern any rational meaning from the 1934 change, which seems to imply the “Centre”, is an object.

Cast your mind back to the Tracing Board of the First Degree. The point within the circle is described as a *position in life*, the point from which a Master Mason cannot err. It is an “ethical” standard, implying the specific foundation upon which the freemason should base his conduct. Here he is supported on either side by the wisdom of those two great characters Moses and King Solomon, with his life over-arched by the VSL, and all of this *within* the context of Freemasonry and the lessons of its ritual.

Note that before the Craft was de-Christianised the two great parallels were referred to as St John the Baptist and St John the Evangelist, because “they were the two most eminent Christian patrons of Masonry and since their time in every well regulated and governed lodge, there has been a certain point within a circle ...”<sup>12</sup>

This then is the path, stretching out the whole of a Master Mason’s life, which will lead him to the “genuine secrets of a Master Mason.” There can be no short cuts; there is no word or token that can be given to a Freemason that makes him instantly perfect as a man, and remember, rituals aside, the purpose of Freemasonry is to make better men (*i.e.* better spiritual and moral temples). In fact the death of Hiram Abif is essential in Freemasonry otherwise the dogma would have to deliver some arcane knowledge that would make us *perfect men*!

As we go though life that with each action we take or deed we do, that is in conformance with our Masonic teaching, we add figuratively another sheet of gold to the wall of our temple, another silver spoon for the shewbread table.

How will we know when we have discovered the genuine secrets of a Master Mason by ourselves? That can only be judged by the supreme authority himself, TGAOTU.

It is not the possession of the secrets that makes us better men and Freemasons; it is the life- long journey we take in the search. And that is as it should be.

To those who say the Craft degrees are incomplete, I say both figuratively and literally, “*You missed the point*”.

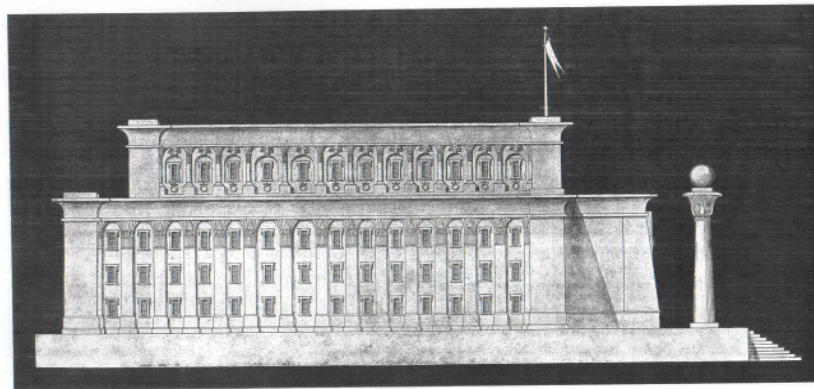
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<sup>11</sup> GLNZ                      *The Ritual of the Three Degrees of Freemasonry*, Wellington Reprint 2004), p195

<sup>12</sup> Carlile R                *A Ritual and Illustrations of Freemasonry*, W Reeves, London, (1831), p30

## Appendices:

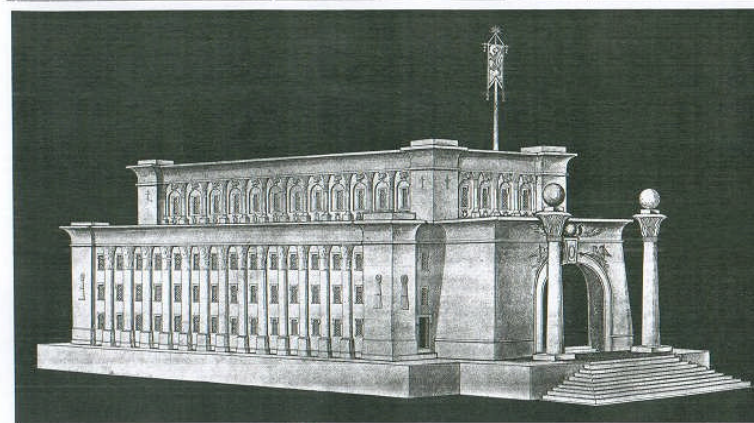
### Appendix 1: Side View of King Solomon's temple



OUR HOLY AND BEAUTIFUL HOUSE WHERE OUR FATHERS WORSHIPPED THEE.

Isaiah LXIV:11.

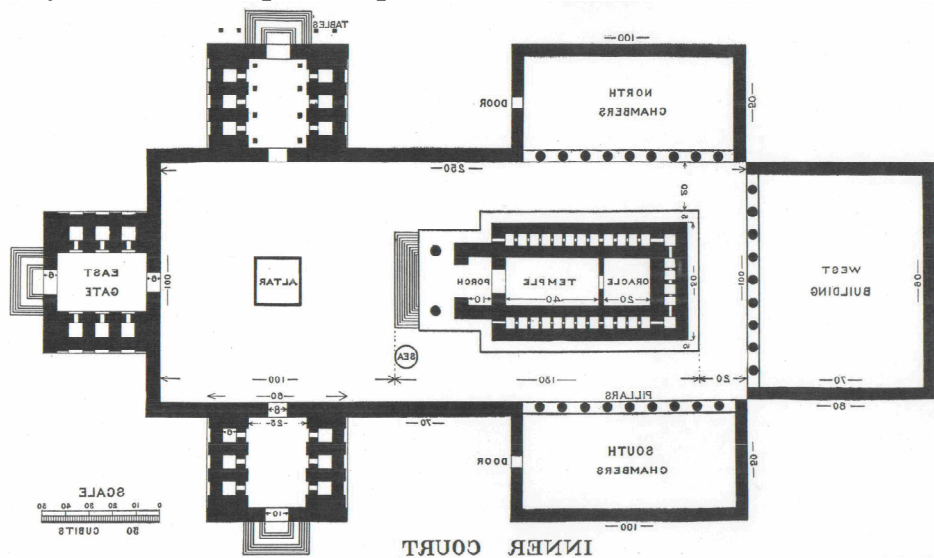
### Appendix 2: Quarter View of King Solomon's Temple



SON OF MAN,  
Behold with thine eyes and hear with thine ears  
And set thine heart upon all that I shall show thee.

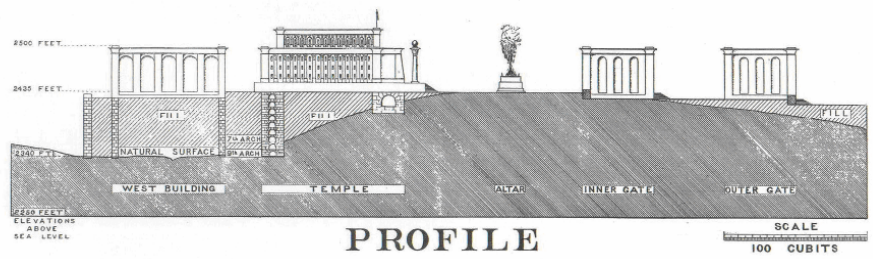
Ezekiel XL:4.

### Appendix 3: Layout of the Temple Complex

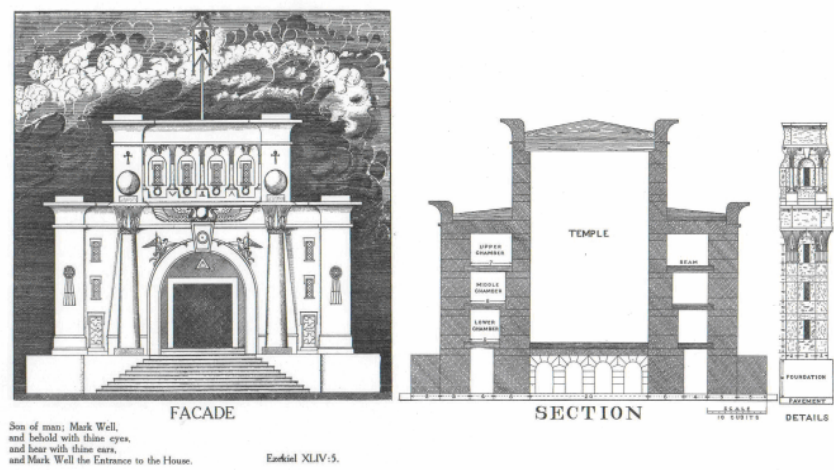




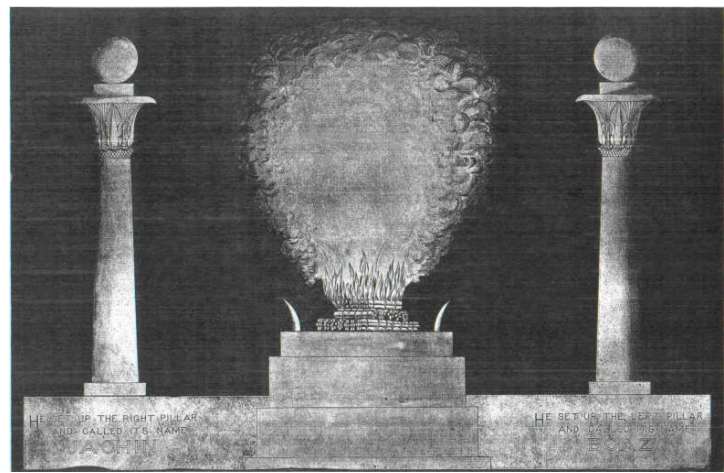
Appendix 4: Longitudinal Section of King Solomon’s Temple



Appendix 5: Temple in Cross Section



Appendix 6: Two Great Pillars and Altar



Appendix 7: Mount Mor Yah and the Quarry

