

The Bible and the Mason

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Upon the Altar of every Masonic Lodge, supporting the Square and Compasses, lies the Holy Bible. The old familiar book, so beloved by so many generations, is our volume of Sacred Law and a Great Light of the Lodge. The Bible opens when the Lodge opens; it closes when the Lodge closes. No Lodge can transact its own business, much less initiate candidates into its mysteries unless the Book of Holy Law lies open upon its Altar. Thus the Book of the Will of God rules the Lodge in its labors, as the Sun rules the day.

Nor is it strange that it should be so. As faith in God is the cornerstone of Freemasonry, so, naturally, the Book which tells us the highest truth about God, is its Altar-Light. Upon no other foundation can men build with any sense of security when the winds blow and the floods descend.

Therein our Fraternity is wise, building its temple square with the order of the world and the needs and hopes of men, erecting its philosophy upon faith in spiritual verity and ruling its conduct by the immutable principles of moral law. While we may not say that Masonry is a religion, in the sense that it is one religion among many, it is none the less religious in its spirit and purpose; not simply a code of ethics, but a fraternity founded upon religious faith — its teachings transfigured by the truths of faith which lie behind all sects and religions

and are the exclusive possession of none. It seeks to develop moral and spiritual life, to purify thought, to refine and exalt character — in short, to build men and then make them Brothers and Builders; and to that end it takes the Bible as its Guide, Prophet, and Friend.

By the same token, our gentle Craft knows a certain secret, almost too simple to be found out, whereby it avoids the angry disputes about the Bible by which men are divided into sects. It is profoundly religious but it is not dogmatic. The fact that the Bible lies open upon its Altar means that man must have some Divine revelation, must seek for a light higher than human to guide and govern him. But Masonry lays down no hard and fast dogma as to the nature of revelation. Nor does it attempt a detailed interpretation of the Bible. The great Book lies upon its Altar, open for all to read, open for each to interpret for himself. It is the genius of Masonry that it unites men, not upon a creed bristling with debated issues, but upon the broad, simple truth which underlies all creeds and overarches all sects — faith in God.

For that reason, no matter how widely religious teachers may differ in their doctrines, in the Lodge they meet with mutual respect and good will. At the Altar of Masonry they learn not only tolerance, but appreciation. In its kindly air of fellowship, they discover

that the things they have in common are greater than the things that divide. It is the glory of Masonry that it teaches Unity in essentials, Liberty in details, Charity in all things, on the ground that all just men, all devout men, are everywhere of one religion; and it seeks to remove the hoodwinks of prejudice and intolerance so that they may recognize each other and work together in the doing of good.

So much every Mason ought to know why the Bible lies upon the Altar of the Lodge, a source of strength, a focus of fellowship, and a symbol of the Will of God for the life of man. Today the only Book is central, sovereign, supreme, the master light of all our seeing, a law to our hearts and a light to our craft. From the Altar it pours forth upon the East, the West, the South its white-light of spiritual vision, moral law, and immortal hope. Almost every name in our ceremonies is a Bible name, and students have traced about seventy-five references to the Bible in our Ritual. But more important than direct references is the fact that the spirit of the Bible, its faith, its attitude toward life, pervades Masonry like a rhythm or a fragrance.

As the Mason reads his Bible he will find many things familiar to him in Masonry, in imagery as well as in idea, aside from its fundamental spiritual faith and moral command, which are in our human world like the great rock ribs which hold the earth together. The Bible is a chamber of imagery, a book of parables, a literature of symbols, and it shows us life under many metaphors and similitudes, among them the imagery of architecture — man the Builder, God the Builder, and men as living stones to

be cut, polished and built into a House of the Eternal; and we learn in a new setting, the old symbolism of the working tools, as we are taught to use them in the Lodge.

Yet the Mason will search the Bible in vain for anything akin to a Masonic ceremony or degree. Even in the history of the building of King Solomon's Temple — the motif of our symbolism and drama — there is nothing which resembles, or even remotely suggests, what we are shown in the Lodge. To cite but one example: the tragedy of Hiram Abiff, so central in the mysteries of Masonry, is not met with by hint or intimation in the Biblical record.

Plainly the biblical coloring of Masonry — its scenery and setting today — did not come into it directly from the Bible, but from secondary sources and by long, roundabout ways which we are unable to trace so that by the time the Craft had taken its legendary, to say nothing of its ceremonial form, its dramas suggested by incidents in the Bible had been transformed into new shapes and put to new uses. The Legend of the Lost Word, the Substitute Word, the Great Temple, the Master Builder, all these, and much else in Masonry, no doubt had their original inspiration and suggestion directly from the biblical narratives; but that they have wellnigh lost all touch with their sources, and, as a fact, have become a system of universal symbolism, belonging equally to all men and all religions. And this is as we should like to have it, because Masonry, alike by its principles and its profession, is seeking to create a universal fellowship.

The drama of the Master Degree, as all agree, was modelled upon the drama of the Ancient Mysteries, a dra-

ma older than the Bible, older even than the civilization whose origin and development the Bible records and interprets. When, where, and by whom this oldest of all dramas was taken up, recast, and given its biblical setting and symbolism, nobody knows and we may never learn.

No Mason needs to be told what a great place the Bible has in the Masonry of today. As soon as an initiate enters the Lodge, he hears Bible words recited as an accompaniment to his advance toward the light. Upon the Bible he takes solemn vows of love and loyalty, of chastity and charity, pledging himself to the practice of the Brotherly Life. Then as he moves from one Degree to another, the imagery of the Bible becomes familiar and eloquent. In the First Degree he hears the 133rd Psalm, in which a happy singer of a time far gone celebrates the job of a God-annointed brotherly fellowship. In the Second Degree he sees in the imagery of the prophet Amos a plumb-line held in the hand of God, and let down from heaven to test the worth and work of men and nations. In the Third Degree he listens to the last chapter of Ecclesiastes, a litany of old age and decay, unmatched in any language, describing the slow crumbling of mortal powers and the masterful negation and collapse of the body, until the golden bowl is broken, and the dust returns to dust, and the spirit of man takes its long last flight to the God who gave it.

Like everything else in Masonry, the Bible, so rich in symbolism, is itself a symbol — that is, a part taken for the whole. It is a symbol of the Book of Truth, the Scroll of Faith, the Record of the Will of God as man has learned it in the midst of the years — the per-

petual revelation of Himself which God has made, and is making, to mankind in every age and land. Thus, by the very honor which Masonry pays to the Bible, it teaches us to revere every Book of Faith in which man has found help for today and hope for the morrow. For that reason, in a Lodge consisting of Jews the Old Testament alone may be placed upon the Altar, and in a Lodge in the land of Mohammed the Koran may be used, according to the laws of the Mother Grand Lodge. Whether it be the Gospel of the Christian, the Book of Law of the Hebrew, the Koran of the Muslim, or the Vedas of the Hindi, it everywhere Masonically conveys the same idea — symbolizing the Will of God revealed to man, expressing such faith and vision as he had found in the fellowship of the seekers, and finders of God.

None the less, while we honor every Book of Faith in which man has found comfort and command, with us the Bible is supreme, at once the mother-book of our literature and master-book of the Lodge. Its truth is inwrought in the symbolism of our Craft; its vision lights all our way, showing us the meaning and worth and destiny of life. Its very words have in them the memories, echoes, and overtones of voices long since hushed, and its scenery is interwoven with the holiest associations of our lives.

It behooves every Mason, of every rite and rank, not only to honor the Bible as the Great Light of the Craft, but to read it, study it, live with it, love it, take its truth to hear and learn what it means to be a man. There is something in the old Book — a sense of God, a vision of a moral order, a pas-

sion for purity, an austere veracity, a haunting pathos and pity — which, if it gets into a man, makes him both gentle and strong, faithful and free, obedient and tolerant, adding to his knowledge virtue, patience, temperance, self-control, brotherly love, and pity. The Bible is as high as the sky and as deep as the grave; its two great

characters are God and the Soul, and the story of their life together is its everlasting romance. It is the most human of books, telling us the half-forgotten secrets of our own hearts, our sins, our sorrows, our doubts, our hopes. It is the most divine of books, telling us that God has made us for Himself. Δ !

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Islam Temple Initiates 102



Pictured above are some high ranking dignitaries of Nile Temple, AAONMS, who composed the divan which came to Manila to confer the degrees of the Order on over a hundred candidates. With them in the picture are MWB Ofilada, Grand Master and RWB Pedro Gimenez, Grand Orator, of the Grand Lodge of the Philippines, both of whom were among

those initiated in the Order.

The majority of the candidates are Scottish Rite Masons belonging to Luzon Bodies, some of them coming from Siagon and Singapore. Prior to their taking the Shrine degrees, they were conferred the Scottish Rite degrees at the year-end conferral of the Luzon Bodies. Among others who took the Shrine degrees are candidates from Philippine and Manila Bodies.