



Provincial Grand Lodge of East Lancashire

The Story of the two Scribes

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Introduction

1. The magnificent Temple built and furnished by King Solomon was not blessed with long life. Solomon was surrounded by Pagan peoples, and his own subjects tended from time to time to fall away into idolatry; indeed soon after Solomon's death, ten of the twelve tribes broke away to form an independent kingdom, which later made the fortified city of Samaria its capital. The two faithful tribes, Judah and Benjamin, remained in Jerusalem, which was on the great trade route between Syria and Egypt. But, during the long wars between the Assyrians and the Egyptians, Jerusalem was invaded many times, and treasures were carried away from the Temple.
2. What appeared to be the end of both Jerusalem and its Temple, came under the Babylonian empire. When King Nebuchadnezzar ordered Jerusalem to be sacked, the Temple treasures were stolen, and the two faithful tribes were carried off into exile back to Babylon, leaving only a few peasants behind to till the land. In Babylon the Jewish exiles lived in small settlements, and having no temples, they formed congregations to keep alive their love of Judea, and their faith in their God. About seventy years later, Cyrus, the king of Persia conquered Babylon and he issued an edict, permitting the exiles to return to Palestine, and inviting the two faithful tribes to rebuild the city and the Temple of Jerusalem.
3. King Cyrus gave the two tribes his protection, supplied them materials for carrying out their work, and together with treasures for the temple, promised to restore the riches carried off by Nebuchadnezzar. Under Zerubbabel the new Governor, and with the assistance from Joshua the High Priest, and the Prophets Haggai and Zechariah the Second Temple was built and dedicated to the worship of God. But as the years passed, the priests became careless and corrupt and the Temple services became neglected. It was fifty-six years after the completion of the Temple that Ezra first arrived in Jerusalem.

Scribe Ezra

4. The name "Ezra", or sometimes-called "Esdra" means "a helper". From Biblical history we find that Ezra was the son of Seraiah, and a descendant of Hilkiyah and Eleazer. A priest and a skilled scribe in the Law of Moses, a trained teacher in the statutes and regulations of the law. By his own request Ezra was commissioned by the Persian King, Artaxerxes, to go to Jerusalem carrying rich gifts and offerings for the service of the Temple. Ezra's retinue comprised nearly two thousand people, including priests, Levites and servants, and after a journey of nearly four months they reached the safety of Jerusalem.
5. Ezra's commission, which extended to the power of life and death, enabled him to draw upon the king's officers for such supplies as he may require, they also supported him in his desire to re-establish the Law of Moses in full force among the people. A fresh start for God's people could be found only in a return to God's Word. The people had returned from captivity so that they would be able to worship God, according to the Law.

6. But the people still had a tendency to wander away from the words of God, written by Moses. Ezra was appalled because of the people's sin; he knew that it was for such sins that Israel had gone into captivity. Deeply shaken, Ezra tore his clothing and hair and went to the Temple where he fell on his knees to the Lord in prayer. But there was still hope for Israel, and they called upon the people to make a covenant before God.
7. Having accomplished great reformations by separating marriages with strange wives, and having appointed judges and magistrates, Ezra then returned to Babylon to make a report to his king. Thirteen years passed, and Ezra again travelled to Jerusalem, where he was actively engaged with Nehemiah who was then the civil governor. Ezra collected the ancient Sacred Books of his people and then prepared and circulated copies of the Holy Scriptures. It is a tradition among the Jews that by Ezra's legendary achievements, the services of the Synagogues were established.
8. There is no reliable record to be found concerning Ezra's death, but it is assumed that he returned again to Babylon and passed away. Another theory is that Ezra died at a very advanced age in Jerusalem, and was there interred "with great honour and magnificence". The Companion Scribe Ezra, in our Royal Arch Chapters today is quite different from the great Teacher of the Sacred Law in the bible, but his skills and expertise in secretarial duties and administration of the Chapter, is highly valued.
9. Companion Scribe Ezra's station is in the North, and his jewel comprises two pens in saltire, surmounting a triangle, apex upward, appended to his collar. He is the senior officer of the Chapter, ranking next to the Third Principal. Companion Scribe Ezra has some part to play during the Ceremony of Exaltation, but his role is a minor one, the major portion of his responsibilities are concerned with the Chapter records, and similar duties carried out by the Secretary of a Lodge, but the importance of his Office cannot be overestimated.

Scribe Nehemiah

10. The name "Nehemiah" or sometimes called "Nehemias" has several meanings, "consolation", or "repentance of the Lord", or "rest of the Lord". He was a son of Hachaliah, of the Tribe Judah. Nehemiah was a cupbearer at the royal palace to the Persian King, Artaxerxes. Nehemiah was a man of wisdom who was discreet, and consistently honest and trustworthy to his King. He had heard that following the building of the temple by Zerubbabel, and it being beautified by the treasures brought by Ezra. That in the following years, the people were still persecuted by their enemies, and they were unable to rebuild the city walls.

11. Nehemiah was a man of patriotism, action, courage and perseverance. His first impulse always was to pray, he spent four months in prayer before making his request to the King. The King hearing of his concerns, immediately sent Nehemiah with a suitable guard, and a royal letter giving him assistance and full powers as Governor, to rebuild the city walls. Arriving in Jerusalem some thirteen years after Ezra, he rested for three days; whilst by night he secretly surveyed the ruined walls of the city and the gates consumed by fire.
12. Nehemiah then announced his plans for rebuilding the walls; he soon roused the depressed spirits of his countrymen. Their energies and hopes revived under his inspiring influence, they rebuilt the broken walls of the city, despite the fierce hostility of the Samaritans, who were suffering a grievance. For they had offered to assist the returned exiles to rebuild the Temple, but had been spurned by the two faithful tribes, who regarded them in spite of their Jewish blood, as foreigners. All through the rebuilding of the Temple and walls of the city the Jews had to reckon with the hostile Samaritans.
13. Finally, after false accusations of treasonous intentions against Nehemiah, the King instructed the rebuilding to be stopped. But the builders with their trowel in hand and sword at their side, finished the city walls in fifty-two days before the King's command arrived. Returning to Persia, and recovering the king's favour, Nehemiah again travelled to Jerusalem. With increased powers, he erected the city gates, repaired the houses of the city, and took measures to increase the number of the inhabitants within the walls, so that they could adequately defend themselves. He then completed the repairs of the Temple, and with the assistance of Ezra took a census of the people.
14. Then for seven days, every morning till midday, Ezra and his helpers opened the Book of the Law, and read the true laws of God, in such a way that the people understood their meaning. This public reading and explanation of God's Book brought a great wave of repentance, and a revival among his people. They celebrated the Feast of the Tabernacles, kept the Day of Atonement, and he invited the people to enter into a covenant of obedience to the commandments of the Lord God of their Fathers. Nehemiah closed the city on the Sabbath so that no trading could take place, he guaranteed the proper support to the Temple and priesthood, and he forbade mixed marriages.
15. After a second journey to Persia, returning again to Jerusalem, he devoted himself to rectifying many grave evils, and took measures to promote the welfare and good name of his people. It is not clear to when Nehemiah's administration of Jerusalem came to an end, nor is there any details of the declining years of his honourable life. It would seem that after being at least twelve years in Jerusalem, he finally returned to his post with the king of Persia, where he died and was interred.

16. From what we have learned, it can be seen that in our present day Royal Arch Chapters, the Officer who bears the title of Scribe Nehemiah, is a representative of a noble and inspiring character. A man who was a renowned patriot, a wise and judicious statesman, brave and truehearted, but above all, "as perfectly religious a man, as ever did honour to human nature". Companion Scribe Nehemiah's Jewel is similar to that of Scribe Ezra, with two pens in saltire surmounting a triangle, apex upward, appended to his collar.
17. Companion Nehemiah's seated position in the Chapter should be in the South, opposite to the Scribe Ezra's table, and not as the recent custom of being seated near the doorway. His standing in the Chapter is on a par to that of the Junior Warden in the Craft, and he is responsible for all admissions into our Convocations. In the South he completes the Catenarian Arch, diagrammatically taken through the three Principals to Scribe Ezra. His announcements to the Principals, reporting on his duties to and from the entrance, should on every occasion, be given from the West, at a spot midway between the Sojourners' chairs and the Kneeling Stool.

Summary

18. From these accounts recorded in the Old Testament, we learn that there were three celebrated returns, to the fortunes of Jerusalem and from the period of captivity. Zerubbabel, a Prince of the people rebuilt the Temple; Ezra, a skilled scribe and priest who rebuilt the people; and Nehemiah, a patriot and leader of men rebuilt Jerusalem's walls and prosperity. Three great role models in the history of the Temple of Jerusalem, taken by our Antient Brethren and adapted for use as Masonic principles of morality, in our Royal Arch Chapters today.

Prepared by:

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