

# Royal Arch Stories, The Tribes to the Sojourners

*By John Cavanagh - 20 minutes*

This further collection of stories prepared by John takes us from the Exodus from Egypt right through to the Grand Sanhedrin finishing with the Sojourners Story. As in the other collection they maybe presented as a whole or in any combination and by a number of different presenters.

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## The Beginning Of The Twelve Tribes of Israel

The story of the rise and fall of the twelve tribes of Israel is a story of fifteen hundred years, but it all starts with the founder of modern religion, Abraham. It was his great grandchildren, the children of Jacob, who bore the names and formed the families that became the twelve tribes. Due to a famine in their homeland they relocated to Egypt around two thousand BC. The families that were to have a dramatic effect on world history numbered then just seventy people. Life became better in Egypt, and over four hundred years their numbers swelled to six hundred thousand men, not counting the women and children as the sex discrimination act didn't apply then, so women and children didn't count. Their Egyptian hosts turned against them and their fortunes declined; they became slaves. It couldn't really get any worse for them; this was their lowest point. Hopefully it could only get better and it did. For it is at this point in history that we are introduced to one of the brightest characters in the annals of freemasonry, Moses.

## The Camp of the Israelites

So nearly two million people wandered through the Sinai desert and made their encampments. The book of numbers describes how the camps of the twelve tribes were to be formed: "Every man of the children of Israel shall pitch by his own standard, with the ensign of their Fathers House". And so were the camps of the twelve tribes formed:  
In the North, under the ensign of Dan, the tribes of: Dan, Asher and Naphtali  
In the East, under the ensign of Judah, the tribes of: Zebulon, Issachar, and Judah  
In the South, under the ensign of Reuben, the tribes of: Gad, Simeon, and Reuben  
In the West, under the ensign of Ephraim, the tribes of: Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin  
This is how they marched through the wilderness: the clans of Judah first, then Reuben, Ephraim, and Dan. They were to face many hardships and rebellions, but under the devoted steadfast leadership of Moses, the leader appointed by God, they were on their way to the Promised Land.

## The Promised Land

If Moses had owned a Sat Nav, history may have been changed forever. But he didn't, and it took the Israelites forty years on foot, and they walked over the same terrain several times. What a miraculous journey that must have been. During this time God spoke to Moses on many occasions and God told Moses how he wanted his people to live and worship. Moses led them through the Sinai desert and finally to the edge of the Promised Land into modern day Jordan. The Lord called Moses and told him to go up to Mount Nebo so he could show him the Promised Land.

Moses: "Yes my Lord?" The lord said:

"This is the land that I promised Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob".

The Lord showed Moses the Land he had promised The land in the North, the Hills, the Dead Sea, the Dessert, the Mediterranean coast, and the whole of modern day.

"And I promised these lands to their descendants".

(Pause)

"I have let YOU see it, but I will not let you go there".

So the greatest, and the leader, of the descendants of Abraham would not be allowed to enter the Promised Land. He had led them through some of the hardest times. So it was that Moses, the Lords servant, died and was buried by the Lord in the valley of Moab. He was one hundred and twenty years old. The people wept for thirty days for Moses; they feared that the tribes may not succeed without him as their leader.

## The Rise of the Twelve Tribes

But all was not lost, this was the birth of a new Nation. The twelve tribes had arrived in the Promised Land and were now led by Joshua. Not our Joshua but another great leader and they have got your name wrong anyway (pointing to 3rd Principal), but that's another story. They were ruled for many years by Judges, and under their leadership the new Nation moved forward. The people clamoured for a King, but God wasn't pleased as he saw it as a rejection of him The people chose.

Saul as King but he sinned against God. God then chose a common shepherd boy by the name of David. He was a great King, beloved by the people, invincible in battle. He founded the City of Jerusalem and took the Arc of the Covenant there. He married Bathsheba and she bore him a son David who promised that his son would one day be King. He named his son Solomon.

## The Israelites Split into two countries

I can no longer stand this anymore; I can't believe that you could obliterate all your faith in the one true God. You're destroying all our fundamental beliefs; you're destroying yourselves; look what you've become; is this what Moses wanted? Would you destroy all he worked for; can't you see the error of your ways? You were my friends and families once. Come on Benjamin, are you with me?

I draw a line in the sand (does so West to East in the Centre of the room), and that land shall be yours (points to the North), and this shall be mine (points to the South), and you can worship whatever you choose. We shall worship the True and Living God Most High.

So the Kingdom was split in two. The South worshipping the one true God, and the North praising whatever. The tribes in the North retained the name Israel with their capital at Samaria, but they faced a terrible end at the hands of Assyrian invaders. They had turned away from the God of Moses and they were punished. They were dispersed, driven away. The Assyrians settled foreigners in Israel so that the Northern Kingdom could never be re-established. They became the Lost Tribes of Israel as Moses had foretold.

Here in the South things were better. We called our Land Judah, and we were strong. We had the one true God on our side, so we were able to repel the Assyrian invasion. But although strong, we were only a small Nation and could not repel the might of the invading King Nebuchadnezzar. The Jewish Nation was nearly destroyed and Solomon's temple was burnt to the ground. All the leaders were carried off in chains to Babylon. Thus after a painful development lasting over a thousand years, it all came to a sad end for the last of The Twelve Tribes of Israel. Or did it?

## The 2nd Temple

The Returning exiles numbered forty thousand according to the records created by our Scribe Ezra. He recorded their names in this register (holding book in hand)

Aaron  
Abarron  
Abiathar  
Abijah  
Abif  
Ahimelech  
Amasa  
Ammi  
Arion  
Avishai

(Turning to address Principal Officer)

Is it your wish that we take the rest of them as read Sir?

Yes!

Forty thousand aren't many compared to the millions at the time of Solomon. But they were proud and eager to rebuild the temple. It would not be of the same splendour as the first temple, nor would it be built as quickly. Work finished in five fifteen BC, and a consecration took place in March with goats as sacrifices for the sins of the twelve tribes of Israel, for they were still represented. It corresponded in size to Solomon's temple as it was built on the foundations of the first temple, but was simpler and more austere with none of the lavish furnishings. It did not contain the Arc of the Covenant for that had disappeared, as the legend has it with Nebuchadnezzar.

The twelve tribes had fallen from great heights to this and the new temple was no longer the central shrine of an independent Kingdom, but the house of worship of a struggling religious sect in a neglected corner of the Persian Empire.

The Epilogue "A closing thought"

Moses spoke to the people and said: "If you obey the Lord your God and faithfully keep all his commands, He will make you greater than all other nations on earth. The Lord will bless your towns and fields. The Lord will bless you with many children, abundant crops and with many cattle and sheep. The Lord will defeat your enemies when they attack you. The Lord will bless your crops and the food you prepare from them. He will send rain in season and bless all your work. If you obey the Lord and do everything He commands He will make you his own people. "But if you disobey the Lord and you do not faithfully keep his commands, He will curse your towns and fields, He will curse your corn crops and the food you prepare from them, The Lord will curse you by giving you only a few children, poor crops, and few cattle and sheep, The Lord will curse everything you do".

The Lord was true to his word; as the ten tribes disobeyed Him so disaster befell them. Only the tribes of Judah and Benjamin followed in the ways of the Lord and were saved. The other ten tribes were dispersed throughout the known world, and disappeared from the face of the earth without trace or remembrance to this day.

Therefore, let us all learn the great lesson our story teaches; God has given us all a choice to choose good against evil, to live according to His laws and His covenant so that our own tribes and families will prosper.

As the Royal Arch teaches us to be closer to God so let us hope that we all will heed this great lesson and follow His commands and be greatly blessed with His grace and love. Finally let us hope that our family; our tribe; of The Supreme Grand Chapter of England will truly follow the True and Living God Most High, and prosper in His grace and covenant for evermore

Companion you're Improperly dressed.

Companion Your Improperly dressed so I must stop you before you proceed.

You are not wearing your regalia properly and you're giving the Reverential or Hailing Sign from the wrong place and in an incorrect manner. To parody Morecambe and Wise, you are doing some of the right things, but not necessarily in the right order.

Your ribbon or sash should be worn over your left shoulder so that it hangs down on the right hand side of your body – the opposite side to where you would normally wear your sword. This is in allusion to those Companions who assisted at the building of the Second Temple, who, "each with the trowel in his hand and sword by his side were ever ready to defend the City and Holy Sanctuary". In this instance the right hand held the trowel, while the sword was in the left, and there is a further allusion to this in the toast to the pious memory of the Grand Originals at the Festive Board, where the glass is always held in the left hand. And, of course, you shouldn't forget that the penal sign in the Royal Arch is the only perfect sign in Freemasonry given with the left hand.

When entering the Chapter, a companion should go to the Point Of Address, in the West, midway between the PS and the KS, to give the R or H Sign. In all cases the sign is directed to the pedestal, and not to the Principals. No steps are taken before the signs are given and the thumb is kept concealed within the hand. The left hand with the thumb concealed is raised to the forehead with the thumb-side of the hand against the forehead as if shading the eyes. After a distinct pause, the right hand, also with the thumb concealed, is raised to the left breast as in the Sign of Reverence. After a slight pause, the sign is dropped, not cut, by dropping both hands to the sides. The sign should be given reverentially, without haste, and without flourishes.

Now you are properly attired and have properly addressed the Principals you may continue.

## Looking for The Ark of The Covenant

"Where is it, have you got it (asking a companion) what about you ? etc etc etc

Well it must be here somewhere; it's why the temple at Jerusalem was built, to house it, and the ancient scriptures doth say, "It came to pass that when it shall be carried or at rest it will be covered in blue cloth". Looks around see 3rd Principal points and fixes gaze on 3rd Principal, Walks over to 3rd Principal, You, yes you in the blue cloth, Are you covering it, Are you sat upon it, rejoice is it found ? You see I'm talking about The Arc of the Covenant fool, it travelled with the Israelites throughout the 40 years in the wilderness. It remained with the Israelites until Solomon built the Temple at Jerusalem in 930BC to house it in the Holy of Holies. There it remained in darkness for 300 years or so, until the Babylonians captured Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple. At that point it just disappears from history. I've been looking for it ever since and I thought you lot might have it.

Just remember in the Royal Arch ceremony when our Companions returned from captivity and the sojourners found the Holy of Holies whilst preparing the ground, The Ark of the Covenant was not there. It's never mentioned in our story again.

But there is a clue to its whereabouts in the Second Book of Maccabees, the prophet Jeremiah who ... prompted by a divine message ...took the Arc and went away to the mountain from the top of which Moses saw God's promised land. Jeremiah found a cave; he carried the ark into it, then blocked up the entrance

"The place shall remain unknown until God finally gathers his people together and shows mercy to them."

But that could be just a legend I think that tyrant Nebuchadnezzar might have melted it down for its gold, but that's possibly hearsay, I've been searching for some fellow called Dr Indiana Jones, legend says he's got an idea where it is. so I keep on looking.

## Those who fled the City

1stAssSoj Arrives in a Master Masons apron

H: Strangers, whence come you?

1stAssSoj: From Babylon, ME.

H: What is your request?

1stAssSoj: Having heard that you are about to rebuild the Temple to the Honour and Glory of the MH, we are anxious to sojourn amongst you, and to assist in that great and glorious undertaking.

H: As no strangers can be permitted to assist in that most Holy work, we demand to know who you are.

1stAssSoj: Brethren of your own Tribes and families, ME.

H: But are you not descended from those who basely fled when the city and Holy Temple were oppressed? Or, are you of that menial Tribe left behind by the Babylonian General, for the purpose of tilling the land?

1stAssSoj: We would scorn to be descended from those who basely fled when the city and Holy Temple were sorely oppressed Neither are we of that menial Tribe left behind by the Babylonian General for the purpose of tilling the land.

Many of you will have faithfully learned and will have, no doubt, expertly delivered the above words. The question is: Who were those who basely fled?

When Nebuchadnezzar sent his general Nebuzaradan to bring Judah to heel, the only thing, apart from King Jehoakin and his people, to 'disappear' from the Temple at Jerusalem were the holy vessels, which were later returned by Cyrus, the Temple (at this stage) was left intact, and as Jehoakin had been 'removed from Office', a puppet King called Mattaniah was placed on the throne to replace him.

To emphasise the fact that Nebuchadnezzar expected absolute compliance from Mattaniah his name was changed, as was the norm in those days for those placed in high office, to 'Zedekiah' which means 'the justice of Jehovah to remind him of what was in store for him if he failed to toe the party line! Apparently, Zedekiah was a somewhat disreputable character who broke all his promises so Nebuzaradan invaded Jerusalem again. Zedekiah and some of his followers tried to escape but was caught, blinded and bound in fetters of brass, fulfilling the prophecy that the last King of Judah would be carried to Babylon, but his eyes would not see it, though he would die there. It is interesting to note that there has been no King of Judah appointed ever since.

This 'escaping party' were those now referred to in our ritual as 'those who fled when the city and Holy Temple were oppressed'.

### Where do we meet?

Well, where are we? (your Masonic Hall) you might say; but that would deserve no prize. Perhaps we should therefore look closely and study the full significance of just where we meet.

The first place is in the open air in the wilderness of Sinai, we are on a journey from the slave camps of Egypt across the Red Sea into the desert called Horab. What you see before you is part of what it must have looked like to those Hebrews as they camped.

The second place is within the tabernacle or sanctuary; the moving Temple that travelled with us on our journey. The surest sign that we are in the presence of a Holy Place is that there before our eyes is a pillar of white marble on which a bowl of incense would once have burnt, placed in the outer chamber of the Holy of Holies.

The third place that we meet is the Grand Sanhedrin, which gathered in the courts around the Holy Temple and here we meet further exiles that returned from far away lands.

Zerubbabel the Prince, Haggai the Prophet, who foretold of his return and Joshua the Priest, who helped restore worship at Jerusalem. Also in this place are Ezra and Nehemiah and other Companions who formed the Grand Sanhedrin. These then are the three locations that we find ourselves today, in the wilderness of Sinai, within the tabernacle and around the Temple of Jerusalem. In each case we are in sacred territory and bound on the Lord's business.

### Why are we not Brothers?

The word Companion originally came from a military background. It referred to soldiers who shared bread together, messmates. Your Companions were the men with whom you ate in the barracks and with whom you fought in the field. They were the men who you defended in battle and who defended you; the men on whom your own life might depend and they in turn on you. Your relationship is closer than friendship, closer than that of a brother. Relationships made in battle are hard to forget. In the Royal Arch our relationship to each other is a closer one. The term Brother is not enough in the Royal Arch – we need something more and we have it in the relationship of a Companion. We should be proud of this bond, this relationship, to call each other Companion.

### Why with the left hand?

It is a tradition in Royal Arch Masonry that we use the left hand on many occasions, the penal sign, for taking wine and carrying our sword and this tradition must have caused you to think as to how and why it came about? The answer lies back with our ancient brethren who returned from Babylon and started to rebuild the walls of the city of Jerusalem.

It is said that they had their trowel in their right hand with which to rebuild the city walls, whilst their left was free; with which to fight. The sword would have been buckled to their right side and it is from this legend that we, in respect to them, wear our sash upon our left shoulder to hang on the right side symbolically to hold our sword.

The building of the city walls was of such importance that to put down one's trowel was not allowed. This is why we use of the left hand for the penal sign – the sign signifying the sword. As for taking wine, when a stranger approached how should we greet him – by laying down our trowel and shaking his hand whilst holding a sword in the left?

Not the friendliest of welcomes. Would it not be better to put down one's sword and to drink his health with the left?

### The Murderer who Spoke to God

What i am going to tell you; you may not like. What i am going to tell you; you may not believe, but it's true and the Bible tells us so, You may not know and you may not like the fact that Moses, murdered an Egyptian, burying him in the sand and then fleeing into hiding in Midian, now known as Saudi Arabia, where he became a shepherd.

Years later Moses was in the hills when he saw a burning bush that did not seem to burn away and he heard a voice say "TAKE OFF THINE SHOUES, FOR THOU STANDEST ON HOLY GROUND. I AM THE GOD OF THY FATHERS".

Moses was afraid and hid his face. God told him that He had come to rescue the Hebrews and that Moses was to go to the Pharaoh and tell him to "LET MY PEOPLE GO" and Moses was to lead the people out of Egypt.

Moses said to God "You want me, a wanted man, to go to the most powerful man on Earth and tell him that my God says let all my people go?" "This is MY COMMAND", said God.

Moses realised that speaking to Pharaoh would be easier than speaking to the Israelites who had been settled for 400 years. Moses said to God "When I go to the children of Israel and say the God of your ancestors has sent me", they will say "but what is His Name?"

For the first time since the dawn of time the True and Living God Most High was revealed for God said "Tell them that I AM THAT I AM hath sent you".

So Moses became God's spokesman. But Moses was a poor speaker (more Ar Ar Arkwright the shopkeeper than Charlton Heston) and he told God to give the task to his brother Aaron, but God saw goodness in Moses and told him he would be with him. What he didn't know was that God would never let Moses go to the promised land.

## The Grand Sanhedrin and The Number 72

During the Exaltation ceremony you will remember when the Sojourners are told to report any discovery to the Grand Sanhedrin – but what was the Grand Sanhedrin?

Well, it originated from the Council of Elders formed in the wilderness when Moses was instructed to select 70 men to form a Tribunal for judicial and administrative purposes.

This he did, but on their return from the tabernacle, two other men had received prophetic spirit and Moses added them to their numbers. This makes the 72 used in our ritual today. It wasn't formed from 6 members from each of the 12 tribes, as is a popular misconception.

There is legend that there were 71 seats around King Solomon's throne and this Council of State assisted the King – again adding King Solomon to the number makes 72.

The number 72 features again with the Jews when the Bible was first translated into ancient Greek. It was said to have been done by 72 translators, 6 from each of the 12 tribes of Israel. This task was completed and agreed upon in 72 days.

The supervision of matters relating to the Temple almost certainly came under the control of the Grand Sanhedrin. It is not surprising therefore that those Companions making the discovery in the vault should be rewarded with seats amongst the rulers and Princes of the people.

## What was lost and found?

We should not take our ritual too literally; remember that it is based more on legend than fact. One thing is for sure - that not even in the darkest days of the dispersion of the Israelites was the name of GOD lost. They may have ceased to worship Him, but the prophets and reforming Kings of Israel ensured His name was not forgotten. It is said that what King Solomon lost and also the Kings that came after him for the next 400 years was the belief that JEHOVAH was the only God of Israel and that Israel had only one GOD.

This was a religious secret known only to the children of Israel. The loss was due to the fact that Solomon and most of his successors disobeyed GOD'S commandments and worshipped Gods of other nations. What was found by the time the captives returned was that JEHOVAH was not just the only GOD of Israel, but that he was the GOD of all nations, the one and only GOD for all mankind. Only on their return did they realise this for the first time. It was this discovery that became woven into the fabric of our Royal Arch legend, a legend that is meant to point the way to a belief in the True and Living GOD Most High as seen by each Companion. A legend that contains a secret that paradoxically is not a secret, namely that JEHOVAH is not just the name of the GOD of Israel, but the name of the GOD of each and every one who lives on Earth, be he Christian, Muslim, Hindu or a member of any other religion. He is the True and Living GOD of us all.

## The Sojourners Story

Think for a moment about the central part of our story. Three men returning from captivity in a foreign land; where, on at least one occasion they had been in danger of wholesale massacre because they were Jews. They came back to the ruins of the city of their great King David. This was the city where King David's son Solomon, under whom their nation had seen its greatest age, had built a House dedicated to God. The house where the Arc of the covenant, bore witness to the covenant of GOD with his people, had finally come to rest. To the Sojourners the city was sacred and part of their history. It was made more precious because until then they knew it only by repute. Now they saw it. The place where GOD had brought his people from their captivity in Egypt and had now brought their generation out of Babylon to cause his Sacred Name to dwell.

What did they expect to find? What they found was desolation and deserted ruins. Where once the Temple had proclaimed the majesty of GOD and the authority of His people and all that was most sacred to them lay forlorn and ravaged.

It must have been a terrible experience to these travellers who had travelled many months; it must have been a vivid remainder of the disobedience that had led them into captivity.

Small wonder that they were contented in what Zerubbabel offered them that they replied; "any position that your Excellences appoint us will be deemed an honour conferred" and they meant it so long as it related to the building of the House of GOD.