



## SOLOMON'S TEMPLE – THE PILLARS OF THE PORCH (PART I)

by George Weil

*Freemasonry is a living fire where answers fuel new questions.*

I would like to discuss with you the pillars from King Solomon's Temple in two parts. The first part will be a snapshot of history and the second will be the details of the two pillars. Many argue that there is no part of the architecture of the ancient Temple, which is so difficult to be understood in its details as the Scriptural account of these memorable pillars. Hopefully, we can shed more illumination toward this beautiful subject.

*The Society adopted the Temple of Solomon for its symbol, because it was the most stable and the most magnificent structure that ever existed, whether we consider its foundation or superstructure; so that of all the societies men have invented, no one was ever more firmly united, or better planned, than the Masons . . . The edifices which Freemasons build are nothing more than virtues or vices to be erected or destroyed; and in this case heaven only occupies their minds, which soar above the corrupted world. The Temple of Solomon denotes reason and intelligence." (Rev Dr George Oliver DD, 1801)*

In the earliest of times it was customary to perpetuate remarkable events, or exhibit gratitude for providential favors, by the erection of pillars. Ancient temples often had two pillars. For example, the two obelisks at the temple of Karnak are far older than the two pillars of Solomon's temple. Among the Egyptians the pillars were, in general, in the form of obelisks from fifty to one hundred feet high, and exceedingly slender in proportion. Upon their four sides hieroglyphics were often engraved. According to Herodotus, the Greek researcher and storyteller of Halicarnassus (fifth century BCE) and the world's first historian, they were first raised in honor of the sun, and their pointed form was intended to represent his rays.

The pillars most remarkable in Scripture history were the two erected by Solomon at the porch of the Temple. It has been surmised that Solomon, in erecting these pillars, referred to the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire which went in front of the Israelites in the wilderness, and that the right hand or South pillar represented the pillar of cloud, and the left hand or North pillar represented that of fire.

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 *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*.

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.<sup>1</sup>

The pillars are described in three Biblical passages: *1 Kings 7, 15-21 and 2 Chronicles 3, 15-17 and 4, 11-13*. All three descriptions, name the right hand pillar *Jachin* and the left hand one *Boaz*. But what is still questioned today is whether right and left should be taken from the inside or outside of the building.<sup>2</sup>

The idea of gravity was unknown to the people of the ancient world, and they were unable to understand the support of the earth in its place. Hence they looked to some tangible explanation and none appeared more plausible than the manifest strength that pillars represented.

The Old Testament abounds with references to this idea. "*For the pillars of the earth are the Lord's and he hath set the world upon them*" (1 Samuel, 2:8); "*He shaketh the earth out of her places, and the pillars thereof tremble*" (Job, 9:6); "*The earth and all its inhabitants thereof are dissolved; I bear up the pillars of it*" (Psalm Book 1, 75:3)

All the old religions taught the same doctrine; that of pillars being regarded as the supporters of the earth, they were adopted as the symbol of strength and firmness. The Masonic symbolism of the two pillars may be considered, without going into minute details, as being twofold.

First, in reference to the names of the pillars, they are symbols of the *strength* and *stability* of the institution. Second, in reference to the ancient pillars of fire and cloud, they are symbolic of our dependence on the superintending guidance of the Great Architect of the Universe, from which our strength and stability are inexorably secured.

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<sup>1</sup> Encyclopedia of Freemasonry and Kindred Sciences, Albert Mackey, Vol. II, Chicago, 1878, p. 778.

<sup>2</sup> Symbols of Freemasonry, Assouline, New York, 2000, Chapter 8, p. 44.