



## *Provincial Grand Chapter of Warwickshire*

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### *Biblical Characters Featured in the Scripture Readings during the Installation of the Three Principals*

The explanation below is an attempt to briefly outline the backgrounds of the unfamiliar (in some cases) biblical characters mentioned in the scripture readings in a Royal Arch Chapter Installation, but now have little or no connection with the ceremony of exaltation.

The scripture readings prior to the Installation of Joshua (the High Priest) refer to Moses, Aaron and Jacob: Moses was the son of Amram a member of the Levite tribe of Israel and a descendant of Jacob. According to the book of Exodus, Moses was born of a Hebrew Mother and was one of the second generation of Israelites born during the Egyptian captivity. We are all familiar with the story of how, as an infant, his mother hid him in the bulrushes when the Pharaoh ordered all newborn Hebrew boys to be slaughtered.

Consequently he ended up being adopted into the Egyptian royal family. After killing an Egyptian slave master, Moses fled and became a shepherd and was later commanded by God to deliver the Hebrews from slavery. After the ten plagues were unleashed on Egypt, he led his people eastward out of Egypt, through the Red Sea and wandered in the desert for 40 years. During this period Moses received the Ten Commandments from God on Mount Sinai and was instructed to build the Tabernacle to house the Ark of the Covenant. He was prevented from entering Canaan, the 'promised land', as he had disobeyed God when he instructed him how to bring forth water from a rock in the desert. It is recorded that he died at the age of 120 years on Mount Nebo on the eastern side of the river Jordan.

Aaron was the elder brother of Moses who became the first High Priest of the Hebrews. Whilst Moses was receiving his education in the Egyptian royal court during his exile among the Midianites, Aaron and his sister Miriam remained in the eastern border-land of Egypt, there gaining himself a reputation as an eloquent and persuasive speaker. When the time came for the release of the Israelites from their captivity, Aaron became his brother's spokesman.

Jacob was the son of Isaac and the grandson of Abraham. He played a major part in some of the later events in the Book of Genesis. Jacob had 12 sons by his two wives and two concubines and thus sired the origins of the twelve Tribes of Israel. His sons were Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Joseph and Benjamin.

Different characters are mentioned in the Scripture Readings prior to the Installation of Haggai (the Prophet) namely; Samuel, Eli and Abram:

Samuel was the last of the Hebrew (biblical) Judges and became the first of the Major Prophets in the land of Israel. He is reputed to have selected/anointed the first two kings of the kingdom of Israel: King Saul and King David. Samuel was the son of Hannah who was childless and made a vow promising that if she had a son, he would be a Nazirite and would be dedicated to God. Samuel was raised by Eli and in the passage of scripture read prior to the installation of Haggai we are reminded of how God called Samuel and instructed him how to respond Eli, a Priest in Shiloh, appears in the bible rather suddenly in the biblical narrative, when Hannah, who is childless, is seen praying to God for a child. Eli, who is sitting at the foot of a doorstep in the sanctuary, sees her apparently mumbling and thinks she is intoxicated, but is soon assured by her motivation and sobriety. He blesses her after she promises the child to God. Subsequently Hannah becomes pregnant; her child is named Samuel and is left in Eli's care.

Abram (latterly called Abraham). Perhaps the most well known story regarding Abraham is told in Genesis:22 of him being commanded by God to offer up his only son Isaac as a sacrifice in the land of Moriah. The patriarch travelled three days until he came to the mountain. There he commanded his servant to wait while he and Isaac proceeded alone up the mountain, Isaac innocently carrying the wood upon which he would be sacrificed. Along the way Isaac repeatedly asked Abraham where the animal for the burnt offering was. Abraham replied that God would provide one.

Just as Abraham was about to sacrifice his son, he was prevented from doing so by an angel, and given on that spot a ram which he sacrificed in place of his son. As a reward for his obedience he received another promise of numerous seed and abundant prosperity.

The text read at the installation is taken from Genesis:17 referring to God's covenant and records "Neither shall thy name be called Abram, for thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations I have made thee" etc. Thus Abraham became regarded as 'the father' of the Israelites.

Yet more characters, in addition to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are mentioned in the Scripture Readings prior to the Installation of Zerubbabel (the King) namely; Saul and Jesse:

Saul was the first King of Israel. According to the Books of Samuel, Saul was the son of Kish, and a member of the tribe of Benjamin; however according to some scholars, the Books of Samuel originally stated that Saul was the son of Hannah and Elkanah but were amended and now state that Hannah, who had been childless, had asked God for a son, and when she became pregnant, named the son Samuel; meaning this passage now refers to a different person, the last of the Hebrew Judges, rather than the person who would become king Jesse was the son of Obed, and the grandson of Ruth. He was a Bethlehemite, and the father of eight sons. The youngest - David, became the second King of Israel after King Saul. He is described in Samuel:16 as "ruddy, with a fine appearance and handsome features."

#### **THE CONNECTION TO KING SOLOMON'S TEMPLE:**

King David eventually conquered Jerusalem and made it his capital. He brought the Ark of the Covenant to the city with the intention of building a magnificent temple to house the Ark and replace the aging temporary structure built by Moses. However, David was a man of war and tasked his youngest son and eventual successor Solomon with the job of constructing the first temple - King Solomon's Temple.

The Hiramic Legend in the Craft is based on the construction of this first temple, it was located on Mount Moriah on the sacred spot where many years earlier Abraham had been about to sacrifice his only son. It was indeed a monumental task which, or so we are told, took seven years to complete in the 10th century BCE.

Much later the prophet Jeremiah predicted the destruction of Jerusalem and the seventy year captivity of its people. The city and first temple were indeed 'utterly destroyed' by Nebuzaradan, Captain of the Guard to Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon in 586 BCE. Our 'story' in the Royal Arch is based upon the legend of the secret vault, the eventual return of the descendants of the captives and the commencement of the construction of the second temple. It is also interesting to note that 'The Book of Haggai' (2:9) records a prediction that "the glory of the second temple would be greater than that of the first"!

The RA Ceremony is based on a legend which has been interwoven with familiar biblical stories which give rise to the philosophic teaching of to-days ritual. You should also be aware that the ritual has been drastically revised and amended many times, especially following 'the union' in 1817 and again in 1834. Oddly it still retains some references, especially in the scripture readings, to characters which have otherwise been completely removed from to-days exaltation and installation ceremonies.

The RA 'legend' is based on the writings of Ezra, Haggai and the Jewish historian Josephus and is concerned with the accidental discovery of an underground chamber or crypt and its contents on the site of the first temple. It is from this legend, derived from the writings of the historian Philostorgius, which forms the basis of the 'story' depicted in our current ritual. Please note that the descriptions of the temple in the bible do not give any indication that there were any such subterranean passageways or secret chambers. However, the Degree of 'Grand Tyler's of Solomon' in the Order of the Allied Masonic Degree's is enacted in a vaulted chamber in the bowls of the earth beneath the site of King Solomon's Temple (the first temple), where the three Grand Masters regularly met to confer the progress of the building. In order that they might have the advice and counsel of the most prominent craftsmen in Jerusalem, King Solomon formed an Order called 'Mason's Elect of Twenty Seven' which consisted of the three Grand Masters and twenty four of the most eminent Fellow Crafts. The chamber was thought to be so secure that the Tyler's office became neglected and by chance, a strange brother gained access. What happens next cannot be told here but warns of the dangers of carelessness and hasty judgement and teaches the importance of careful Tying.

This story suggests that there were indeed 'other passageways and secret chambers' located deep under the original temple, or does it ? If they do exist, they may contain the missing Ark of the Covenant ! But as yet, they remain undiscovered. The trouble with Masonic research is that the answer to a question quite often begs another question!

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