PILLARS

May 3, 2004

My Brothers,

In the Holy Writings on our altar we are told of the two pillars at the entrance to King Solomon’s Temple. The writings say that they were denominated Boaz and Jachin. In the ancient Hebrew language Boaz means "strength". Jachin means "to establish". We are told that the pillars represent a promise from the GAOTU about the Temple; that in strength it will be established.

We learn in the Lecture of the Entered Apprentice Degree about the quarrying of the stones and the provision of the timbers and how they fit together with precision, with such exact nicety, that the Temple more resembled the handiwork of the Supreme Architect of the Universe, than that of human hands. Today, its remaining foundations are known as the Wailing Wall. This wall still exists some 2,700 years later despite the Temple’s destruction twice in its history, once by the Babylonians, and more recently in AD 70, by the Romans, who tore it down to those very foundations in response to a major revolt against their rule.

While reflecting on some Degree work in-progress, I was thinking about the Holy Writings and the building and destruction of the Temple. It occurred to me that, like many other interactions between the GAOTU and man as recounted in the Holy Writings, this particular promise might have more than one interpretation or meaning for us. "In strength I will establish." Its literal meaning is a statement of omnipotence from the GAOTU. The message is that the Divine is all-powerful and in this strength is an implied promise of protection and over-watch for those who worship from the Temple. The building of the Temple, at Divine direction, with its massive stones and huge timbers all fitting exactly, is a testament made by human hands, to the promised strength and power of the GAOTU.

And yet, it was destroyed, not once, but twice, and the second time it was leveled down to its foundations. This should raise some profound questions. What kind of strength is necessary to establish and keep a temple? Was it not enough that the GAOTU commanded that it be built; shouldn’t the Temple be sitting there in Jerusalem today as strong and indestructible and perfect as the Divine Word that caused it to be built, to be established?

Now, I don’t profess to be a theologian and most of us aren’t trained or educated to be theologians. But, as Masons, we are directed to reflect upon and take guidance from the Holy Writings. So, let’s reflect and see what guidance may come from that.

Apparently, it is not enough for a temple to be built of massive stones and thick timbers, no matter how cleverly the stone and timber is interlocked. Its foundations, all that is left of its glory, stand today as mute testimony to the frailty of man’s endeavors. The Romans demonstrated that what is built by the hands of man can be destroyed by the same hands, no matter how holy its origin or massive its construction. In its destruction, the Divine promise that a temple will be established in strength is empty and troubling for us unless it has a deeper meaning, something that goes beyond stones and timbers, maybe something beyond the physical.

Elsewhere in the Holy Writings, we read that we are living temples, housing the Divine spirit. Masonry says that we build this spiritual temple agreeably to the rules and guidelines laid down by the Supreme Architect of the Universe in that great book of Nature and Revelation on the altar. We construct our spiritual temple with the stones of belief and the timbers of understanding. But, we build this spiritual temple knowing that there are still Romans in the world; our faith and hope in the Deity are challenged by world events and the closer pains and sorrows of daily living. These trials shake us to our foundations. They test whether our spiritual temple is fitted together with exact nicety, or if our beliefs are not so well constructed. They test the interlocking soundness of our faith and hope.

For Masons, the message of the physical Temple, its construction and its destruction, is to be strong in our faith, not in our hands, alone. It says for us to erect our spiritual temple, not with physical tools and earthly materials, but with the more noble and glorious Divine guidance and Masonic values. In so doing, we build something that no human hands can tear down; we build a Temple of Spirit to house the Divine within us. And the message also says to be strong in our faith, for we will be tested; there are, still, Romans in the world.

Boaz. Jachin. Divine words meaning, "In strength will I establish".

In strength, what will we establish - and keep?

Br. Stephen C. Harrington