

NV Grand Lodge Short Lecture Series

CORN, WINE, & OIL

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The wages which our ancient brethren received for their labors in the building of King Solomon's Temple are paid no more. In the lodge we use them as symbols. Corn, wine, and oil have been associated together from the earliest times. The importance of corn, wine, and oil is littered throughout the bible. In Deuteronomy the "nation of fierce countenance" which is to destroy the people "shall not leave thee either corn, wine or oil." In II Chronicles we read "the children of Israel brought in abundance the first fruits of corn, wine and oil." Nehemiah tells of "a great chamber where aforetime they laid the meat offerings, the frankincense and the vessels, and the tithes of the corn, the new wine and the oil" and later "then brought all Judah the tithe of the corn, the new wine and the oil into the treasures." There are other references in the Great Light to these particular forms of taxes, money and tithes for religious purposes; wealth and refreshment. In ancient days the grapes in the vineyard and olives in the grove and the grain of the field were not only wealth but the measure of trade; so many skins of wine, so many cruses of oil, and so many bushels of corn were to them as are dollars and cents today. Thus, our ancient brethren received wages in corn, wine, and oil as a practical matter; they were paid for their labors in the coin of the realm.

The oil pressed from the olive was as important to the Jews in Palestine as butter and other fats are among occidentals. Because it was so necessary, and hence so valuable, it became an important part of sacrificial rites. There is no point in the sacrifice which is only a form. To be effective it must offer before the Altar something of value; something the giving of which will testify to the love and veneration in which the sacrificer holds the Most High. Oil was also used not only as a food but for lighting purposes; more within the house than in the open air, where torches were more effective. Oil was also an article of the bath; mixed with perfume it was used in the ceremonies of anointment, and in preparation for ceremonial appearances. The "Precious ointment upon the head, which ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard, that went down to the skirts of his garment;" as the quotation has it in our entered Apprentice Degree, (and Nevada's Master Mason opening and closing) was doubtless made of olive oil, suitably mixed with such perfumes and spices as myrrh, cinnamon, galbanum and frankincense. Probably oil was also used as a surgical dressing; nomadic peoples, subject to injuries, could hardly avoid knowledge of the value of soothing oil. With so many uses for oil, its production naturally was stimulated. Not only was the production of the olive grove a matter of wealth, but the nourishing and processing of the oil gave employment to many. Oil was obtained from the olive both by pressing - probably by a stone wheel revolving in or on a larger stone, mill or mortar - and also by a gentle pounding. This hand process produced a finer quality of oil. "And thou shalt command the children of Israel that they bring pure olive oil beaten for the light, to cause the lamp to burn always." (Exodus, 27-20.)

The corn of the Bible is not the corn we know today. In many, if not most of the uses of the word, a more understandable translation would be simply "grain." The principal grains of the Old Testament days were barley and wheat; corn represents not only both, but all the grains which the Jews cultivated. Our modern corn cultivated and cross-bred was, of course, unknown to the ancients, although it might be going too far to say they had no grain similar to the Indian maize from which our great corn crop has grown.

Scarcely less important to our ancient brethren than their corn and oil, was the wine. Vineyards were highly esteemed both as wealth and as a comfort - the pleasant shade of the "vine and fig tree" was a part of ancient hospitality. Vineyards on mountain sides or hills were most carefully tended and protected against washing away by terraces and walls, as even today one may see the hillsides of the Rhine. Thorn hedges kept cattle from helping themselves to the grapes. The vineyard operator frequently lived in a watch tower or hut on an elevation to keep sharp look-out that neither predatory man nor beast took his ripening wealth.

Corn, wine, and oil were the wages paid our ancient brethren. They were the "Master's Wages" of the days of King Solomon. Masons of this day receive no material wages for their labors; the work done in a lodge is paid for only in the coin of the heart. But those wages are no less real. They may sprout as does the grain, strengthen as does the wine, nourish as does the oil.

How much we receive and what we do with our wages depends entirely on our Masonic work. A brother obtains from his lodge and from his Order only what he puts into it. Our ancient brethren were paid for their physical labors. Whether their wages were paid for work performed upon the mountain and in the quarries, or whether they received corn, wine, and oil because they labored in the fields or vineyards, it was true then, and it is true now, that only "in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread." To receive the equivalent of corn, wine and oil, a brother must labor. He must till the fields of his own heart or build the temple of his own "house not made with hands. "He must labor to his neighbor or carry stones for his brother's temple.

References

Corn, Wine, and Oil (n.d.). The Masonic Towel. Retrieved from http://www.themasonictowel.com/masonic_talk/stb/stbs/30-08.htm