

NV Grand Lodge Short Lecture Series
THREE GREAT LIGHTS—THE BIBLE

PART ONE OF THREE PART SERIES

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The Bible is properly called a greater light of Freemasonry, for from the center of the Lodge it pours forth upon the East, the West, and the South its refulgent rays of Divine truth. The Bible is used among Freemasons as a symbol of the will of God, however it may be expressed.

Therefore, whatever to any people expresses that will may be used as a substitute for the Bible in a Masonic Lodge. Thus, in a Lodge consisting entirely of Jews, the Old Testament alone may be placed upon the altar, and Turkish Freemasons make use of the Koran. Whether it be the Gospels to the Christian, the Pentateuch to the Israelite, the Koran to the Mussulman, or the Vedas to the Brahman, it everywhere Masonically conveys the same idea- that of the symbolism of the Divine Will revealed to man.

The history of the Masonic symbolism of the Bible is interesting. It is referred to in the manuscripts before the revival as the book upon which the covenant was taken, but it was never referred to as a great light.

Studies of the Ritual necessarily rest upon the Scriptures and of those inspired by Bible teachings and language. One good Brother earnestly and faithfully labored to have certain ceremonies freely edited but when he, devout Churchman as he was, understood that sundry peculiarities of language followed the example of the Bible, he gladly gave up his purpose to alter that which abides equally typical of age as the Scriptures.

What had seemed to him mere repetition was meant for weighty emphasis, as in James (10:27) "Pure religion and undefiled;" Hebrews (12:28) "with reverence and godly fear;" Colossians (4:12) "stand perfect and complete," and in the Book of Common Prayer, the word-pairs "dissemble nor cloak," "perils and dangers," "acknowledge and confess," and so on. These may well be mentioned here as the tendency to change ceremonies is seldom curbed by any consideration of the peculiar merit, other than their quaintness, of the old expressions.

The Scriptures, the Holy Writings, the Volume of the Sacred Law, the Old and New Testaments, the Holy Bible, this word Bible from the Greek, the (sacred) books; the two parts, Old and New Testaments, the former recording the Covenants, attested by the prophets, between the God of Israel and His people, Christ the central figure of the latter work speaks of the new Dispensation, a new Covenant, and the word Covenant in the Latin became Testamentum from which we obtain the word commonly used for the two divisions of the Bible, the Old and New Testaments. These divisions are further separated into the books of the Bible, sixty-six in all, thirty-nine in the Old Testament, twenty-seven in the New.

We must remember that Old and New refer to Covenants, not to age of manuscripts.

Earliest Hebrew writings of the Old Testament only date back to the ninth century after Christ, several centuries later than the earliest New Testament Scriptures.

There is also another method of division in which the books of the Old Testament are counted but as twenty-four, First and Second Kings, First and Second Samuel, First and Second Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and then the minor prophets, as they are called, being grouped as one for

several hundred years by the Jews and then divided into two in the sixteenth century. Roughly we may divide the books into the law according to Moses; the historical books of Joshua, Samuel, and the anonymous historians; the poetry and philosophy; and the prophecies, of the Old Testament.

The Holy Bible, however, is the Great Light in Freemasonry and upon it rests the Square and Compasses in every lodge. As such, the Holy Bible represents the foundation of the work of Freemasonry. The Bible is opened when the lodge is opened; it is closed when the lodge is closed. No lodge can conduct its business without the Holy Bible open upon its Altar. Thus, it rules the lodge during its labors. More importantly, it is central to the work of the Freemason as he works to develop his moral and spiritual self-according to the symbolism of the Square and Compasses.

The Holy Bible is the source of enlightenment that all Freemasons should seek. Open upon the Altar, its rays of truth, faith, and hope radiate outward throughout the lodge room, symbolically representing the will of God pouring forth upon the world. The spirit of the Bible, its faith and its attitude toward life and man's relationship to God permeates Freemasonry like a sweet fragrance.

Faith in God is the cornerstone of Freemasonry so it is only natural that the book, which presents to us the truth of God, should be our rule and guide to our faith and practice. The Temple of King Solomon, about which much of the history, legends and symbolism of Freemasonry are developed, was the greatest building of the ancient world. It was the greatest, not because of its grandeur, but for the truths that it represented. In the face of idolatry and superstitions, it represented the unity, righteousness, and spirituality of God. Upon no other foundation can man build his moral and spiritual edifice with any sense of security and permanence in preparation for the hereafter. Within the Holy Bible, the unity, righteousness, and spirituality of God is revealed and within its pages moral truth is stored to light the mind and warm the heart of man.

Like most other things in Freemasonry, the Holy Bible is itself a symbol of Divine Truth in every form. When viewed as a symbol, it represents that divine truth or knowledge from whatever source derived. Freemasonry invites men of all faiths to its teachings, requiring only a belief in a Supreme Being, knowing that we all pray to the God and Father of the Universe regardless of the actual name one uses to address Him. Thus, the Bible is often referred to as the Volume of Sacred Law, allowing men of differing faiths to use the Sacred Writings of their faith as the Volume of Sacred Law.

What does this mean to the Freemason? The fact that the Holy Bible or some other Volume of Sacred Law rests open upon the Altar of Freemasonry means the Freemason must have some Divine Revelation. The Freemason must seek truth and wisdom from a source greater than that from human minds. Freemasonry makes no attempt at a detailed interpretation of the Bible. The Volume of Sacred Law lies upon the Altar open for all to read, open for all to study and interpret for himself. The tie that unites Freemasonry is strong, but it provides for the utmost liberty of faith and thought. It unites men not by creed or dogma, but upon the broad truth of a belief and faith in God, the Supreme Grand Architect of the Universe. Freemasonry is truly a Brotherhood of Man under the Fatherhood of God.

The Freemason should not only respect and honor the Volume of Sacred Law as the revelation of God's divine will for mankind, the Great Light of Freemasonry, he should read it, live it, and love it. The truths contained within its pages should be stored within his heart and guide his use of the Square and Compasses in building his moral and spiritual edifice. The Holy Bible, if it fills man's heart, makes him gentle and strong, faithful, and free. It teaches him goodness, knowledge, self-

control, perseverance, godliness, and brotherly love. It tells us that we will be restless and lonely until we learn to walk with God.

As Freemasons, our moral and spiritual foundation must be built upon the Great Light. It is fitting to close our discussion with words from the prophet Micah. "[God] has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." (Micah 6:8)

References

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