

Nine Men Associated With Three Arks

Dennis M. Haas

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The Bible and Royal Arch Masonry tell us that there were nine men associated with three arks. The men were:

Shem, Ham, and Japheth;

Moses, Aholiab, and Bezaleel;

Joshua, Zerubbabel, and Haggai.

The arks were:

Noah's Ark;

The Ark of the Covenant;

Replica of the Ark of the Covenant.

Shem, Ham, and Japheth

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth and all the creatures thereon. At first He was pleased with his handiwork, but the time came when man was disobedient and thought he didn't need God. Then God spoke to Noah. He told him to build an Ark and take into it his wife, his three sons and their wives and two of every animal. Noah's son's names were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. The Bible tells us that God desired to make a new start on earth with Noah and his three sons, who had not volunteered for such a mission.

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After raining for 40 days and nights the waters of the flood subsided, and the ark came to rest on dry ground. Noah and his three sons descended, built an altar and offered a sacrifice to God. Their descendants went on to re-populate the world (Genesis 10:1). Noah was 500 years old when he began to have children (Genesis 5:32). If Noah had any other children, they are not mentioned in the biblical account. Only Shem, Ham, and Japheth are mentioned.

There is only one biblical story recorded that concerns Shem, Ham, and Japheth. After the flood waters receded, Noah was "a man of the soil" and grew a vineyard (Genesis 9:20). One day, after drinking too much wine, Noah passed out in his tent and lay there naked and exposed. Ham "saw his father naked and told his two brothers outside" (Genesis 9:22). Some have suggested that Ham – or possibly his son Canaan – performed an inappropriate sexual act on his drunken father, but that is nothing more than speculation. Whatever the extent of Ham's sin, Shem and Japheth refused to join him in dishonoring their father; instead, they walked into the tent backward without looking at Noah and lay a blanket over him to cover him (Genesis 9:23). When Noah woke up and found out what Ham had done, he cursed Ham's child, Canaan, saying, "Cursed be Canaan! The lowest of slaves will he be to his brothers" (Genesis 9:25). Noah then blessed his other two sons and reiterated Canaan's servitude to both Shem and Japheth (verses 26-27).

Noah's curse was not an empty threat; the descendants of Ham have indeed experienced a long history of enslavement. This curse is not exclusive to Ham – slavery has plagued the descendants of all three sons – nor does the curse extend to every single person in Ham's line. But the occurrence of slavery within the races descended from Ham is marked and noticeable. In ancient times, it is well documented that the Babylonians, Phoenicians, Carthaginians, Ethiopians, and Egyptians (Hamites) were enslaved by the Assyrians, Persians, Macedonians, and Romans (Shemites and Japhethites). In more modern times,

Western Europeans (Japhethites) and Arabs (Shemites) are well known to have engaged in the slave trade of Africans (Hamites). Noah's curse on Canaan does not excuse the wickedness of slavery, nor does it mean that Ham's descendants are of less worth in God's eyes than the descendants of the other two brothers. The curse is not to be taken as a comment on the intrinsic value of one people-group over another. But the historical record does support the fact of Noah's curse and is powerful evidence of the accuracy of Scripture.

The Israelites came from the line of Shem; in fact, the word Semite comes from the name of Shem. Other descendants of Shem include the Assyrians, Chaldeans, Elamites, Arameans, Moabites, Ammonites, and Edomites. Japheth's line produced the Persians, Romans, Scythians, and Macedonians. Ham's line produced the Canaanites, the Babylonians, the Phoenicians, the Cushites, and the Egyptians. Each of the races and people-groups that exist today can trace their lineage back to one of these three brothers.

Moses, Aholiab, and Bezaleel

At a later time, God selected another man. This time, He selected Moses – One of the great men of all times and all people; a man who spent the first two-thirds of his life being prepared for the last third of his life.

Acting under God's direction, he took a race of slaves and made them a free people. As a free people, they were to have a tabernacle, and the Ark of the Covenant. Three men, Moses, Aholiab and Bezaleel were given the task of building the tabernacle, the ark, and their furnishings. The tabernacle was to be an abode for the ark, and the ark was where God would dwell so he could be near his people. Over a period of time, three things were put in the Ark. An omer (pot) of manna, Aaron's rod, and the book of the law.

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The Ark was deposited in Solomon's Temple. But because a king and his people did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, the Temple and the Ark were destroyed. The king and his people were killed or taken as slaves away from their home and into a foreign land.

After God had given the Ten Commandments, He called Moses up into the mountain; where he remained forty days and forty nights. During that time, God told him to speak to the Israelites, asking them to give gold, silver, brass, blue, purple, fine linen, oil, precious stones, and other things, to make a tabernacle or sanctuary, where God would dwell among them.

God showed Moses the pattern of this tabernacle, with its coverings, its holy place and most holy place, its ark of the covenant with the cherubims and mercy-seat, its table for the shewbread, golden candlestick, and altar of incense, and the garments for Aaron and his sons, etc.; everything was accurately described by God. Then God instructed Moses as to who could do the work He had commanded to be done, and named two to whom He had given special wisdom and skill: these two were Bezaleel and Aholiab.

When Moses came down from the mountain he called Aaron and all the people of Israel, and told them what God had commanded. The people willingly brought gifts, until more than enough was provided. Then Bezaleel and Aholiab, and other wise-hearted men, worked diligently until the tabernacle and all things belonging to it were made exactly as God had instructed. Some worked in gold and silver, others in brass and wood; wise women spun cloth of blue, purple and scarlet, and fine linen; precious stones were set for the high priest's ephod and breastplate; and, at last, all was finished. Then we are told "Moses did look upon all the work, and, behold, they had done it as the Lord had commanded." Then Moses blessed them.

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The dramatic story of the first exodus (from the Egyptian bondage) originally formed part of the ceremony of "Passing the Veils". However, some of the names of those involved in the first exodus remain with us to this day. They are mentioned in the lectures and the readings given in the Installation ceremony.

For example – The historical lecture mentions the names of Moses, Aholiab and Bezaleel: "The first or Holy Lodge was opened two years after the exodus of the children of Israel from their Egyptian bondage by Moses, Aholiab and Bezaleel..."

The description – "first or Holy Lodge" refers to the construction of the Tabernacle by the children of Israel according to God's instructions. We are all familiar with Moses, but who were Aholiab and Bezaleel?

Aholiab was the son of Ahisamakh, a member of the tribe of Dan. He was an artist associated with textiles. He is described in Exodus 38:23 as a master of engraving and weaving.

Bezaleel is described in Exodus 31:2 as the son of Uri, the son of Hur of the tribe of Judah. A Master Craftsman who was apparently a very gifted workman who had showed great skill and originality in engraving precious metals, stones, and wood carvings, who had many apprentices under him whom he instructed in the arts. Moses informed the Israelites that God had chosen Bezaleel to be the architect of the Tabernacle and be in charge of the artistic work, the construction of which is graphically described in Exodus 36.

He and Aholiab were given the task of teaching their skills to other people and for overseeing the work. Bezaleel is also credited with the construction of the Ark of the Covenant, the table for the showbread, the altar of incense and the golden candlestick with its seven lamps.

Joshua, Zerubbabel, and Haggai

Royal Arch tradition tells us that there was a duplicate or copy of the Ark of the Covenant. This duplicate was found in the ruins of Solomon's Temple when it was being rebuilt.

The three leaders of the volunteers were: Joshua (High Priest), Zerubbabel (Governor) and Haggai (Prophet). Darius, King of Persia, gave permission to the Israelite to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple (Knights Templar Red Cross of Constantine). The journey to Jerusalem was a rough and rugged road. The building of the second temple was slow and difficult. The debris of the first temple had to be cleared, and it was in the debris that the duplicate of the Ark of the Covenant was found. The enthusiasm of some of the volunteers turned to lethargy and outright opposition was received from those who had not made the difficult passage from Persia to Jerusalem.

The rebuilding of the temple has a parallel to our spiritual lives. Symbolic Masonry teaches us that we should be Temples as Solomon's Temple was. Solomon had an easy task. David prepared the way. There was no discord among the workers, and it didn't even rain on them. Royal Arch Masonry realizes that difficulties can arise. We lose our enthusiasm, become lethargic, pick up bad habits, hear and follow bad advice and become reluctant to clear away the debris and start all over.

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The discovered ark had three items in it: 1) an omer (pot) of manna to remind us that God fed his people in the wilderness; 2) Aaron's rod to remind us to keep our temple clean; 3) The book of the law to remind us that God's laws are as fixed and sure as any physical law.

From these nine men and three arks, I would like to make these observations without expecting everyone to agree with me. Six of these nine men did not volunteer, In fact, Moses in effect said, "Get someone else." But realizing what was expected, they followed through. It is possible to start over again. Cleaning out debris and building on the ruins may not be desirable or easy but it is possible.

Bibliography

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Provincial Grand Chapter of Cumberland and Westmorland

Masonic Hall, Station Road, Kendal Cumbria LA9 6BT

<http://www.gospelweb.net>

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