

CIRCUMAMBULATION MEDITATIONS

Brother LeGrand is a member of the Texas Lodge of Research and a Past Master of Richardson Lodge #1214, Richardson, Texas. Circumnambulation Meditations was first published in the 1997-1998 Volume XXXII Transaction of the Texas Lodge of Research and is reprinted as the 8-99 STB with permission. This article explains the meaning of the phrases used in the Bible readings in each of the three degrees of Masonry. -Editor

Entered Apprentice Degree: Psalm 133

Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity: It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard, that went down to the skirts of his garment: As the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion; for there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life forevermore.

This is one of approximately thirty-six songs of joy and praise that are recorded in the Book of Psalms, this being one of many written by King David. He begins by telling us to observe, "take note," "be sure you understand" or "examine closely" the joy and pleasure that is derived from unity or harmony among brethren. The Psalmist gives two examples of how valuable the unity is. The first is that of the precious "ointment" or oil with which Aaron, Moses' older brother and spokesman, was consecrated as Israel's first high priest. Expensive as it was, it is evident that it was used in abundance since it ran from his head to his beard and all the way down to the hem of his robe.

The second example is that of the dew of Hermon, which was essential to the success of Israelite agriculture. They usually got the earlier and later rains, but the dew was necessary to sustain their crops during the long hot summers in that arid region. Mount Hermon is the most beautiful mountain in Israel, so one can imagine how much more beautiful it looked to the Israelites when it was covered with the life-sustaining dew.

In the same manner, Mount Zion was beautiful to them because Jerusalem, the Holy City, was built there. It is where they went to offer their sacrifices and to hold their religious feasts and where the Lord God made that blessed promise of life everlasting. This Scripture was probably chosen because unity is essential to the success of Masonry. The unity we enjoy also adds to the pleasure of belonging to a fraternity of like-minded brothers, interested in the same moral and ethical principles.

Fellowcraft Degree: Amos 7:7-8

Thus He shewed me; and behold the Lord stood upon a wall made by a plumb line, with a plumb line in His hand. And the Lord said unto me, 'Amos, what seest thou?' And I said, 'A plumb line.' Thus saith the Lord, 'Behold, I will set a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel. I will not again pass by them anymore.'

Amos was a Judean shepherd in the middle 700s B.C. when he was chosen to be a prophet of God. His main calling was to warn the people of Israel of their impending destruction if they failed to repent their sins.

God delivered the nation of Israel from slavery in Egypt about 1270 B.C. by many miracles, signs and wonders including:

1. The Egyptian plagues;
2. The parting of the waters of the Red Sea;
3. Moses' meeting with God on Mount Sinai to receive the stone tablets containing the Ten Commandments;
4. Bringing water from a rock to quench their thirst;
5. Giving them manna from heaven for food;
6. Not letting their clothes wear out in forty years;
7. Parting the waters of the Jordan River;
8. Bringing them into the land of Canaan, the "promised land," and defeating the idol worshippers who lived there.

After all these and many other miracles, the Israelites continued to be an obstinate and disobedient people. God tried on numerous occasions to bring them back into fellowship with Him. They would usually say they would obey Him, God would forgive them, and then they would revert to their wicked ways.

Then, in the days of Amos, some five hundred years after the Exodus, the Israelites had sunk to an all time moral and spiritual low. The nation was prosperous, but its prosperity was based on selfishness, unfairness to the poor, robbery, theft and murder. The people practiced a token worship of God, but they perverted true worship by paying homage to pagan gods and idols. There was a complete lack of mercy and justice and absolutely no regard for human life. It was at this time that God, through Amos, told them that He will "Set a plumb line in the midst of them"; that is to set a standard of uprightness and justice for them: and that He will "not again pass by them anymore"; he will not overlook their sins anymore.

True to form, the people of Israel, being complacent in their prosperity, did not heed Amos' warning. As a result, Jerusalem was destroyed, and the people enslaved in Assyria in 722 B.C. This lesson admonishes us that while God is forgiving, there is a limit to his patience.

This Scripture was probably chosen because of its reference to the "plumb," which is one of the working tools of the Fellowcraft Degree. The plumb is an instrument used by ancient and modern

craftsmen to determine whether an object is perfectly upright or perpendicular; it has, therefore, become an emblem of the spiritual and moral uprightness so essential in Masonry.

Masters Degree: Ecclesiastes 12:1-7

Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say 'I have no pleasure in them'; while the sun or the light or the moon, or the stars be not darkened, nor the clouds return after the rain; In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble, and the strong men shall bow themselves, and the grinders cease, because they are few, and those that look out of the windows be darkened, And the doors shall be shut in the streets, when the sound of the grinding is low, and he shall rise up at the voice of the bird, and all the daughters of music shall be brought low. Also, when they shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be in the way, and the almond tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail; because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets; or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern. Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was and the spirit shall return to God who gave it.

Most people will agree that one cannot simply read the Bible and expect to glean all meanings, and lessons. Given the lapse of time since it was written and the evolution of languages, some research is required. In no place in the Scriptures is this truth more evident than in the Book of Ecclesiastes, which is liberally sprinkled with metaphors. This is particularly evident in Ecclesiastes 12:1-7, which all Master Masons will recognize as the Scripture passage read during the Master Masons' Circumambulation. Ecclesiastes is defined as "one who assembles" or "one who collects wise sayings." It is liberally translated as "The Preacher." Neither the date this book was written nor the identity of its author or authors is certain. Until the 19th century, scholars thought it was authored by King Solomon, but modern theologians feel that the true composer is unknown. They believe it is written as if King Solomon were the author. (This was an accepted literary device at that time in history). Whoever the author may have been, he is exhorting young people to avail themselves of God's blessings while they are still young.

One can read this passage over and over again without actually understanding its meaning. At least two different Bible commentaries, however, offer the following explanations:

REMEMBER now thy Creator: here, remember" means more than just recalling to mind. It means to "reverence, honor, glorify and worship" God.

In the Days of thy **YOUTH**: means while men are young.

While the **EVIL DAYS** come not: pertains to the rigors of old age.

Nor the **YEARS DRAW NIGH**: means when the time comes near.

When thou shalt Say "**I HAVE NO PLEASURE IN THEM**": refers to the sadness of old age.

While the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars BE NOT DARKENED nor the CLOUDS RETURN after the rain: refers to the storm clouds of old age.

In the days when the KEEPERS of the HOUSE shall tremble: the keepers are the hands and arms while the house represents the body.

And the STRONG MIEN shall bow themselves: refers to the legs becoming crooked. [Bow is an archaic word, meaning to bend.]

And the GRINDERS cease because they are few: refers to missing teeth.

And those that look out of the WINDOWS be darkened: indicates the eyes becoming weak.

And the DOORS shall be shut in the streets: pertains to the ears [Hearing impaired].

When the sound of the GRINDING is low: pertains to toothless chewing.

And he shall RISE UP at the voice of the bird: indicates the inability to sleep, gets up early when the birds start to sing.

And all the DAUGHTERS of MUSIC shall be brought low: indicates the voice is failing and an inability to sing.

Also when they shall be AFRAID of that which is HIGH: pertains to fear of heights and the fear of falling.

And FEARS shall be in the WAY: indicates the fear of crime; because man cannot protect himself.

And the ALMOND TREE shall flourish: pertains to gray hair; referring to the almost white blossoms of the almond tree.

And the GRASSHOPPER shall be a BURDEN: means man becomes weak, unable to lift.

And DESIRE shall FAIL: pertains to the loss of physical appetites.

Because man goeth to his LONG HOME: means heaven.

And the MOURNERS go about the STREETS: pertains to the funeral procession. [Perhaps hired mourners as was the custom in some societies.]

Or ever the SILVER CORD be loosed or the GOLDEN BOWL be broken: the picture here is of a golden lamp suspended by a silver cord. The silver cord comes loose, the golden bowl crashes to the floor, and the light of life is extinguished.

Or the PITCHER be broken at the FOUNTAIN, or the WHEEL broken at the CISTERN: this pertains to the water of life. The broken pitcher can contain no more water. With the wheel broken, water can no longer be drawn from the cistern.

Then shall the DUST return to the earth as it was: pertains to that from which God created man.

And the SPIRIT shall return unto God who gave it: Genesis 2:7 tells us that God formed man from the dust of the earth and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and man became a living soul. So, at the time of death, man ceases to exist on earth and his spirit returns to God, who gave it to him in the first place.

It is much easier for a young person to accept new concepts, ideas and disciplines than one who is older and "set in his ways." By the same token, it is easier for a youth to accept (remember) God and his teachings, principles and ordinances than it is for an older person. Whatever stage of our life, it is imperative that we as men and Masons "REMEMBER NOW OUR CREATOR."

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