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Bro. Burgess also wrote the July 1991 Short Talk Bulletin "Amos, What Seest Thou?"

Editor

"Alas, My Brother!"

By Ray W. Burgess, PGM

The Worshipful Master, holding the evergreen, says:

"This evergreen, which once marked the temporary resting place of the illustrious dead, is an emblem of our faith in the immortality of the soul. By it we are reminded that we have an immortal part within us, which shall survive the grave, and which shall never, never, never die. By it we are admonished that though, like our brother whose remains lie before us, our bodies too shall soon be clothed in the habiliments of death and deposited in the silent tomb; yet, through our belief in the mercy of Cod, we may confidently hope that our souls will bloom in eternal Spring. This, too, I deposit in the grave." He then exclaims, "Alas, My Brother!"

(While Bro. Burgess is referring here to Louisiana Ritual the phrase is very common throughout Masonry and the following story relates how it started.)

This part of our Masonic Burial Service has always intrigued me because of the exclamation, "Alas, My Brother" Solomon was a harsh ruler. His wild extravagances and vain ambition to make Israel a world power led him to impose burdensome taxation on his people. Forced labor was utilized in his vast building programs including a tremendously expensive capital. Rehoboam, following the death of his father, Solomon, ascended the throne as king of all Israel.

The northern tribes, believing that the new king might treat them better than his father, sent for Jeroboam, who had fled to Egypt to escape the wrath of Solomon, to intercede for them. The coronation was to take place at Shechem. Jeroboam joined the rest of Israel at the inauguration and was the ringleader in getting the people to make certain demands on Rehoboam.

"Your father was a hard master," they told Rehoboam. "We don't want you as our king unless you promise to treat us better than he did."

The king requested that they give him three days to think over their demands, but heeding the advice of young men, refused to respond to the appeal. As a result, Israel rebelled.

Jeroboam was then made king of the ten tribes. Only Judah and Benjamin remained loyal to Rehoboam. Although divinely set apart for his task, and raised to the throne with the approval of the people, Jeroboam nevertheless failed to rise to the greatness of his opportunities. It was not long after his coronation that he began to depart from the counsels of the Lord. Fearing that if he allowed his people to annually journey to Jerusalem to worship, it would not be long before they would be enticed to come back to the house of David. So he decided to establish centers of worship at Dan in the north and Bethel in the south. This was at variance with the law of Moses which allowed only one altar of burnt-offering and one place of meeting God. In further defiance of the commandment forbidding the worship of God by means of images, he had two golden calves made and placed one in Bethel and the other at Dan.

He told his people, "It's too much trouble to go to Jerusalem to worship; from now on these will be your Gods." Because the worship of idols radically conflicted with the law of Moses, God gave him a solemn warning through an unnamed prophet who came to Bethel from Judah.

One day, as Jeroboam stood ministering at the altar, the man of God suddenly appeared and admonished the king for his evil ways and prophesied that the altar would be desecrated. When the king heard these words, he pointed to the prophet and cried out, "Lay hold on him," whereupon the hand that was extended menacingly, instantly withered and became paralyzed; he couldn't pull it back again! At the same moment the altar cracked open and the ash spilled to the ground. The king then begged the prophet to pray to his God to restore his arm again. The prophet prayed and his arm was restored. He refused the king's invitation to go home with him to dine, because it was against the will of God and then left for home.

There was an old prophet living in Bethel. When he heard what the prophet from Judah had done and what he had said to the king, he rode after him and found him sitting under a tree. The old man invited the prophet to come with him and eat. The prophet refused, saying "I can't; for I am not allowed to eat anything or to drink any water at Bethel, and God also told me not to return home by the same road I came on."

But the old man told him that he was also a prophet, and that an angel gave him a message from God. He was to take him home with him and give him food and water. But the old man was lying.

So they went together to the old man's home and the prophet ate some food and drank some water.

Suddenly, while they were sitting at the table, a message from God came to the old man, and he shouted to the prophet from Judah, "God says that because you have been disobedient and have come here, and have eaten and drunk water in the place he told you not to, your body shall not be buried in the grave of your fathers."

After finishing the meal, the prophet started off again. As he was traveling along, a lion came out and killed him. Passers-by saw the body lying in the road, with the lion standing quietly beside it, and reported it in Bethel where the old man lived.

When he heard what had happened, he called his sons and they found the prophet's body. They carried it back to the city to mourn over it and bury it. As they laid the body in his own grave, they exclaimed, "Alas, my brother!" (I Kings 13:30)

"Be then persuaded, my brethren, by this example of the uncertainty of human life, of the unsubstantial nature of all its pursuits, and no longer postpone the all-important concern of preparing for eternity. Let us each embrace the present moment, and while time and opportunity permit, prepare for that great change when the pleasures of the world will be as a poison to our lips, and the happy reflection consequent upon a well-spent life will afford the only consolation."