



PAPER

Mosaic Pavement And Blazing Star

Summary: A short talk on the history and symbolism of the Mosaic Pavement and Blazing Star in Freemasonry.

In the Fifth Section of the First Lecture the ornaments of the Lodge are described as The Mosaic Pavement, the Blazing Star and the Indented or Tessellated Border.

The Mosaic Pavement: This is described as the Square Pavement, which may justly be deemed the beautiful flooring of the Lodge. The black and white chequered floorings, which are usually of carpet (sometimes in ceramic floor tiles) are depicted in squares, although in some Constitutions this is a diamond pattern. We are informed that this alludes to the flooring of the Tabernacle, or the mosaic paving to the ground floor of King Solomon's Temple. What is clear, is that the ancient Brethren who prepared our ritual and the learned Brethren who produced the remarkable catechism in the form of Lectures, were not too well informed on this subject. To begin with the Tabernacle was a tent. It did not have a Mosaic floor. In Exodus Chapters 25 and 26 is set forth the instructions and the details of the design of the Tabernacle with the specification laid down for Moses by God:

'According to all that I shew thee, after the pattern of the tabernacle, and the pattern of all instruments thereof, even so shall ye make it'.

There is no mention of a mosaic chequered pavement or tessellated border. In fact Exodus 26:26 informs us that the floors of the tabernacle were laid down in boards of acacia (shittim) wood overlaid with gold.

Similarly Kings: 6:15, 16 & 30 confirm the specification for the floors of King Solomon's Temple:

'And he built twenty cubits on the sides of the house, both the floor and the walls with boards of cedar, he even built them for it within, even for the oracle, even for the most holy place And the floors of the house he overlaid with gold within and without'.

Let us now take a look at the situation, way back at the time of the formation of the First Grand Lodge in London. From 1717 onwards the number of Lodges began to grow rapidly, meetings took place in taverns, coffee houses and tea rooms. On each occasion the Lodge Room had to be prepared, as in those days there was no such thing as a chequered carpet. The late Bro. E.A.T. Reed supplies us with a description of an old time Lodge:

'The room in which they met; being bare boards was sprinkled with sand, when there was to be an Initiation or other special occasion a space in front of the Master's Pedestal was left, or swept clear of sand. In this space the Tyler would draw with chalk, charcoal and blue stone, the ground floor plan of a building, a geometric figure or a tracing board. This was termed 'drawing the Lodge'. If there had been an Initiation it was incumbent upon the candidate to wash this drawing out before the Lodge was closed.'

As time progressed, and tracing boards were introduced, either as a small embroidered tapestry or in hardback; the practice of drawing designs upon the floor was discontinued. Probably at this time, as a sense of seamliness and dignity began to develop, the simple but impressive chequered carpet came into fashion. It is an interesting notion, and possibly true, that this may have been a survival of the operatives' tracing boards; who laid out plans and designs of buildings on paper, cloth or papyrus using chequered squares for setting out the building and to calculate areas or to alter a design (a technique still in use today). Whether or not there was a mosaic pavement in Solomon's Temple is of less importance to us today, than the meaning that Freemasons attach to the ornaments of the Lodge. Masonically, the black and white of the Mosaic pavement is the floor of the Lodge and it is profoundly important. It symbolises good and evil. It has always been the symbol of opposites; whether good and evil, light or darkness even joys and sorrows of our chequered existence. Let us move on to the question of the Blazing Star.

The Blazing Star: The Blazing Star has meant many things to many Masons at many times. It has been:

- The Star in the East
- The Sun
- The rays emanating from God when he gave the tablets of stone to Moses
- A Symbol of Prudence
- The sacred name of God
- Divine Providence
- The Egyptian Anubis – a Symbol of the Most High

All unnecessarily complicated and very contradictory in terms of our understanding of the meaning and symbolism of 'The Three Lesser Lights'.

There is no Biblical reference to The Blazing Star. The matter is further complicated by the fact that most illustrations, lantern slides and charts through the ages depict a Blazing Star with five straight points and not blazing at all; that is, presented by wavy snake-like lines, similar to those depicting flaming swords. Incidentally the Five-pointed star is a Symbol of the Ancient Craft and is known as the Pentagram, from the Greek 'pente' meaning five and 'gramma' meaning letter. It is also known as the Pentalpha.

To add to the complications; this has led in the past to the argument by anti-Masons, who claim that the symbol which according to them represents Venus is termed 'The Bright Morning Star' by Masons, known in occult circles as Lucifer which supports their claim that Freemasonry is about devil worship!

During the Medieval period the Pentagram was a matter of great importance and was known as 'Solomon's Seal' or 'The Endless Knot' which symbolised eternity, without beginning or ending. The Comacine Masters used this remarkable symbol in numerous decorative panels in the building of the Cathedrals of Europe. It was therefore also known as 'The Comacine Knot'.

Let us return to this question of the Blazing Star. Other than the sun, our closest star, stars observed from Earth do not 'blaze', they twinkle. Comets blaze; the best known is Halley's Comet which swings through the inner solar system on its 76 year orbit around the sun. It last visited Earth in 1986 but gave a disappointing display. However, significant to the subject matter in hand in 1066 the comet was so bright that it terrified the population of Europe, and was widely credited with the Norman victory at the battle of Hastings. The spectacle must have been interpreted by some as a 'Blazing Star' and bearing in mind the activity of our Operative Brethren in those days, it is an interesting notion that this could have been its Masonic origin.

Reference has already been made to 'The Bright Morning Star'. This expression is referred to in the Charge in the Third Degree:

'The Lord of Life will enable us to trample the King of Terrors beneath our feet and lift our eyes to that Bright Morning Star, whose rising brings peace and salvation to the faithful and obedient of the human race' - some of the most beautiful words in The Craft Ritual.

The brightest star in the solar system as seen from the Earth is called Sirius or the scientific name Alpha Canis Majoris or Alpha Cma. It is 8.6 light years away from our planet. The Egyptians called it The Dog Star personifying the goddess Sothis. It has significant historical relevance, because the star is visible throughout the summer months, and is at its brightest at dawn in the month of July, announcing the annual flooding of the river Nile.

Whatever the conclusion we as Freemasons may, or may not, reach about the origin and symbolism of either The Blazing Star or The Bright Morning Star. One can derive great comfort and satisfaction as a Christian, as well as being a Freemason from the last page of the Volume of the Sacred Law (Revelation: 22.16).

'I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star'.

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Papers offer a simple, direct means of advancement in a particular aspect of Masonic knowledge. They can be used in a variety of ways:

- Read at home for private study
- Shared for pre-reading by members of a discussion group
- Read aloud in Lodge or Chapter, or in an LOI/COI/new members forum
 - Followed by 'any questions'
 - As a precursor to a discussion (in which case much more time is needed, possibly more than double that allocated to the paper itself)
 - Supported by audio-visual aids, if necessary

They can be delivered by a single person or split into bite-sized pieces and read by multiple presenters (in which case, the speaker(s) should have read and practiced the delivery of the paper beforehand).

*Note: All biblical passages are taken from the Authorized King James version unless otherwise specified.

If the paper is to be used to introduce a discussion, the presenter will need to have thought about the material, done a little research, and prepared some open questions to engage with the audience. Kipling's dictum can be of help in preparing open questions, which should begin with one of his 'serving men', as follows: *'I keep six honest serving men (they taught me all I knew). Their names are, What and Why and When and How and Where and Who'*. Rudyard Kipling

If used as part of an event, the paper should be advertised and promoted by way of trailers, flyers and announcements, in summonses, letters, emails, notice boards, and on social media.

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