



## Paper

# The Second-Degree Tracing Board explained in plain English

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Second-Degree Tracing Board

### **Summary**

An explanation of the Second-Degree Tracing Board in plain English.

### **Keywords**

Second-Degree, Tracing, Board

## The Second-Degree Tracing Board explained in plain English

King Solomon's Temple took seven years to build, and when it was finished, its reputation for magnificence became international.



The two huge pillars at the entrance were much admired. They were called Boaz and Jachin (which means 'established in strength'), an appropriate message to place at the front of God's house. The pillars were big, 8m (24ft) high and 1.8m (6ft) in diameter. They were made of brass and were hollow. The copper and zinc for the brass came from the mines at Succoth, near the Gulf of Suez and they were cast by Hiram Abiff in the clay pits in the Plain of Jordan. Records were kept inside them. At the top were elaborate capitals, depicting lilies and pomegranates, symbols of peace and plenty. On top of each pillar was a large brass sphere, one depicting the heavens, the other the Earth. They were held in place with nets. The pillars were a reminder to the Children of Israel of the Exodus when they were led by a pillar of fire by night and a pillar of cloud by day.

**Second-Degree Tracing Board by John Harris c,1825  
Courtesy of the Library and Museum of Freemasonry**

Many artisans were involved in building King Solomon's Temple, in particular Entered Apprentices and Fellow Crafts. The Apprentices worked for board and lodging, but the Craftsmen were also paid cash wages, providing they knew the password and secret grip. The Wardens had to check them carefully on pay day to make sure nobody got paid wages he hadn't earned. The password was 'Shibboleth' (which means 'plenty' in Hebrew) or 'Flood, stream, ear of corn'. It's depicted on the Tracing Board as an ear of corn near a waterfall, the essentials for life.

The word 'Shibboleth' is first mentioned in the story of the Israelite military commander Jephthah'. Having led an expedition to the land of the Ammonites, whose army he had defeated, he was returning with his

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army to his homeland of Gilead, loaded with loot. The Ephraimites, who lived across the River Jordan from Gilead, were waiting for him. ‘Why should Jephthah’ keep all the loot?’ they said. ‘There are enough of us here to take him and his army out, as they will be tired after beating the Ammonites.’ Jephthah’ tried talking to them, but they wouldn’t listen. They threatened to follow him into Gilead and to burn down his house if he didn’t co-operate. Realising that the Ephraimites wouldn’t take no for an answer, Jephthah’ ordered his army to attack them. He guessed that the Ephraimites would try to flee across the River Jordan, so he placed part of his army at the shallow crossing places. ‘Don’t let them escape’, he told his men. ‘You can spot the Ephraimites by asking them to say Shibboleth. They can’t make the ‘sh’ sound. Don’t waste any time, finish them off!’ Forty-two thousand Ephraimites were killed by Jephthah’s army that day, and ‘Shibboleth’ became a famous password. That’s why the Craftsmen used it to gain entry to the middle chamber of the Temple after they had climbed the winding staircase to collect their wages.

The winding staircase leading up to the chamber had a number of steps, and the Tracing Board assigns meanings to some of the numbers. It reminds us that three people rule the Lodge (the Worshipful Master and his two Wardens). Also, that seven Freemasons are required to make a Lodge perfect (the three rulers, plus two Fellow Crafts plus two Entered Apprentices).

The number three also refers to the three Grand Masters involved in building the Temple: Solomon, King of Israel, Hiram, King of Tyre, and Hiram Abiff, the Chief Architect. The number five reminds us of the five Classical Orders of architecture, used in those elegant ancient buildings in Italy and Greece. And the number seven alludes to the seven years spent in building the Temple, and to the seven Liberal Arts and Sciences, which were evidence of good education.

When the Craftsmen reached the middle chamber, they saw a particular Hebrew sign which corresponds to the letter ‘G’ in English. It stands for ‘God’, for ‘Geometry’ and for the ‘Grand Geometrician of the Universe’, whom we should all respect, revere, and adore.

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##END##

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## Recommended use of Papers

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*).

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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