THIRD TEMPLE AT JERUSALEM

An alternative heading could well be "The Temple of Herod the Great" for it was the result of his ambition and drive. But who was Herod, how came he to be King of Judea, and what led him to erect a new Temple in place of that erected by Zerubbabel? Herod the Great was King of Judea 37 BC to 4 BC. (The latter part of his reign was notable for his cruelty, eg The Slaughter/Massacre of the Innocents). In order to understand we must consider the external and internal factors which brought about a feeling for change among the Jewish people. The word "Palestine" in this text refers to the lands which approximately equated to ancient Canaan or the Biblical "Land of Israel". It was not until the Second century AD that the Romans used that name. It was derived from the Hebrew "pleshet"

What were these external factors? One was the rise of what is termed "Hellenism"; ie, the principles and pursuits, or conformity associated with classical Greek civilization. From about the beginning of the fifth century BC the small city states which comprised Hellas, and particularly Athens, had attained levels of excellence in philosophy, athletics, science, architecture, drama and art far superior to anything that had occurred in the past. The principles of democratic government were first developed in ancient Hellas.

Until 331 BC Palestine had slumbered along as a small and neglected province of the Persian Empire. This changed when Alexander the Great of Macedon conquered what had been the Persian Empire. Alexander had been a provincial governor at 16 and a general at 18. The vast empire he carved out made him the master of the then known world.

Unlike previous conquerors of Palestine he was not driven by a lust for power. He regarded himself as bringing the benefits of Hellenism to every part of the Empire. The Greek language cut across national boundaries as the language common to the educated and the wealthy, and the language of administration, the same as French was the language used at the Czarist courts and until fairly recently was acknowledged as the "diplomatic language". Even though his Empire did not survive him, Hellenism maintained its pervading influence. He did not name a successor, so after his death in 323 BC his Empire was split between his leading generals. His wife Roxanne, who unbeknown to Alexander had been a concubine of the Persian King, and baby son were murdered.

Ptolemy became head of Egypt while Seleucus acquired Persia, Babylonia and Syria. Seleucus set up his capital at Antioch whilst Ptolemy's was at Alexandria. As had been the case throughout its history, Palestine was the meat in the sandwich, part of the disputed border between Ptolemy and Seleucus. Until 198 BC it was held by the Ptolemaic dynasty but in that year, Antiochus 111, the then Seleucid ruler, defeated an Egyptian Army at what is now Banias at the foot of Mount Hermon, and Palestine became part of the Seleucid Empire.

Selecus Nicator (?358 – 280 BC) founded this empire in 312 BC; it existed from Thrace to India.

In certain parts of the near East the native cultures, language and religion were too deeply entrenched for Hellenism to be absorbed. The Judeans and the Persians did not succumb although they could not fail to be influenced. However, the Jews of the Diaspora were strongly influenced, particularly in Alexandria where approximately one million Jews occupied two fifths of the City. The Diaspora was the dispersion of the Jews from Palestine after the Babylonian captivity; ie the Jewish communities. The word itself is of Greek origin. An example of the influence of Hellenism is the Septuagint, a translation in Greek of the Hebrew holy books (including the Apocrypha, the 14 books included in an appendix to the Old Testament but not included in the Hebrew canon. They are not printed in Protestant versions of the Bible) as the Jews of Alexandria no longer understood them in Hebrew. That word comes from Septuagint from the Roman for 70; there were 70 to 72 scholars involved in this work. The King James Version of the Bible was translated from the Greek.

However another power was developing in the area – Rome. To such an extent was Rome's power that when in 168 BC Antiochus invaded Egypt for the second time and had occupied most of the country and was marching on Alexandria he was stopped in his tracks by the arrival of a Roman

Legate, (an Envoy or Delegate) who presented him with an ultimate from the Roman Senate demanding an immediate and complete withdrawal. Antiochus did not dare proceed on a collision course with the newly emerging Roman power, so withdrew. He who fights and runs away lives to fight another day.

During the next century, Rome was to follow a policy of the balance of power. It intervened whenever it thought the situation would be to its long term advantage. For example, shortly after John Hyrcanus became King of Judea, the Seleucid monarch, Antiochus VII endeavoured to reassert authority over Judea. His army occupied Jerusalem but was forced to withdraw under pressure from Rome. Subsequently for a long time there was no external pressure on Palestine.

Now to some of the important internal factors.

It was Jewish policy to convert peoples of occupied territories to Judaism and then eventually absorb them. A notable example was the Idumeans who settled the southern part of Judea after the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. Herod the Great was an Idumean and one of his greatest difficulties when the Roman Senate appointed him King of Judea was that he was a third generation convert, NOT of the line of David, and was unacceptable to most of the orthodox Jews. He was a Roman puppet.

So much time has yet to be given to the influence of Rome and the development of those two important parties within Jewish society, the Sadducees and the Pharisees. This is treated in great detail in 1 and 2 Maccabees (not in the King James version) a study of the history of the two centuries from 200 BC to the start of the Common Era. It is dealt with very well in the Jerusalem Bible. Maccabee is a Greek word meaning “hammerer”; “Ethnarch” is also a Greek word meaning “leader of men”.

Possibly the greatest difference between the Sadducees and Pharisees was the role of the Temple cult in the national life. The former is derived from the name “Adok” who had been high priest at the time of David and Solomon. They were the ‘establishment’; ie the Temple and Palace at the centre with the privileged groups of the priesthood, upper class of nobles and the landed and wealthy merchants. They were by their very nature conservative, adhering strictly to Temple worship and a literal acceptance of the Mosaic Code. They were the groups most susceptible to Hellenism in their personal lives.

The Pharisees were a popular party which appealed to men lower down the social and economic ladder; the artisans, small traders and peasant farmers. They did not reject Temple worship but wanted the law explained in detail directly to the people. Whereas the previous interpretation of the law had been the function of ordained priests, the Pharisees proposed that such interpretation should be done formally by learned men, the Rabbis.

So it can be seen that the fundamental difference between the two was their attitude to Mosaic Law. The attitude of the Sadducees to the law was inflexible, but the Pharisees, while accepting the law as sacred, interpreted it in a much more flexible manner so that the Mosaic Law could be adjusted to the changing needs and concepts of the time. The Pharisees believed that the body of precedents and rulings which became known as the Oral law had been handed down to Moses at the same time as the written law, and that both were equally valid. The Sadduccees rejected this as heresy. Interestingly, the Pharisees adopted from some of the Near Eastern pagan religions certain other beliefs. They came to believe in the resurrection of the dead and in the existence of angels and demons. Although these concepts were repugnant to the Sadduccees, they became grafted on to the main stem of Judaism. St Paul, the founder of the separate Christian Church, was a Jew from a Pharisee family of Tarsus in Asia Minor. He had studied the Torah with the renowned Pharisee sage, Rabbi Gamaliel.

The son of Herod the Great was Herod Antipas, who reigned from 4 BC to his death about 40 AD. He was a tetrarch of Galilee. This word also comes from the Greek; it means the ruler of one fourth of a country. At the instigation of his wife Herodias, he ordered the execution of John the Baptist.

Herodias (?14 BC to ?40 AD) was the niece and wife of Herod Antipas, mother of Salome. She persuaded her husband to ask for the head of John the Baptist. Her ambition led to his banishment.

The grandson of Herod the Great was Herod Agrippa 1 (10 BC to 44 AD) King of Judea 41 AD to 44 AD. He was a friend of the Roman emperors Caligula and Claudius. He imprisoned St Peter and executed St James.

From the foregoing, it will be readily realized that the line of Herod the Great was not a popular one, and why. This lead to great turmoil and eventually in 70 AD the Romans destroyed Herod's reconstructed Temple. It had existed only 77 years.

So this was not really the construction of a Third Temple, but a restoration and extensive enlargement of the second, Zerubbabel's. To the Christian Mason it is interesting, even more so than that of Solomon's Temple, as it was the scene of our Lord's ministrations. It was also the Temple from which the Knights Templar, the warrior monks, derived their name. The work was begun by Herod the Great in 7 BC and completed 4 AD. Read Acts 3 v 11; and find a reference to "Hellenists" in that Book.

TEMPLE OF EZEKIEL

It is an ideal Temple seen in a vision by the prophet Ezekiel in the 25th year of the captivity whilst in Babylon. It is supposed from the description given by the prophet that his vision was that of the Temple of Solomon which he must have seen before he was taken from Jerusalem as a captive and before its destruction. But the land measurements reveal that this could not have been sufficient to contain a building of that size. It influenced Herod the Great to some extent in his restoration of the Temple of Zerubbabel. There is a striking resemblance between the visionary Temple of Ezekiel and the symbolic city of the New Jerusalem. But it has no connection with symbolic or RAMy.