

THE TRADITIONAL LECTURE

The Royal Arch degree has been given a lot of credit; it is the foundation and keystone of the whole Masonic structure; the climax of Masonry; and the completion of the third degree.

Its ritual is so extensive and full of meaning that it's difficult to provide a brief synopsis of it. I've therefore decided to choose one lecture from the ritual and perhaps provide a better understanding of it. The Traditional Lecture which is presented by J. is the biblical history of the 3 epochs [*e-pox*] in Masonry.

First of all, the Oxford dictionary defines an "epoch" as a "long and distinct period of time". To understand the dates of these three epochs, we need to understand what Anno Lucis means. Anno Lucis is Latin for "Year of Light.", referring to the biblical account of the creation of the universe wherein God spoke and said: "Let there be light... and there was light." (Genesis 1:3).

The dates given in the Traditional Lecture are based on the dates found in the margins of some bibles; these generally follow Ussher's system using the number 4004. Basically we add 4004 years to the current Anno Domini, which is Latin for "in the Year of our Lord", calendar year and append Anno Lucis.

The ritual informs us that there are three epochs in Masonry the first or Holy Lodge, the second or Sacred Lodge and the third or Grand and Royal Lodge.

The first or Holy Lodge was opened by Moses, A. & B. at the foot of M.H. It is designated a Holy Lodge, because it was here that the sacred Tables of the Law were given to Moses. The date given in these bibles for the exodus of the Children of Israel from Egypt is 1491 B.C. If 4004 is considered as Anno Lucis 1, the A.L. date for exodus is 4004 -1491, that is 2513. The lecture says that the first or Holy lodge was opened Anno Lucis 2515, two years after the departure of the Israelites from their Egyptian bondage; this agrees with the date according to Ussher's calendar. This Masonic epoch is particularly unique to the Royal Arch; there is no reference to this in the Craft Lodge ritual, other than that the tabernacle of Moses and the Temple of Solomon were both situated due E. and W.

Again, according to Ussher, the date of the laying of the foundation stone of the first Temple was 1012 B.C. Deduct the number from 4004 and we arrive at 2992, the Anno Lucis date given in the lecture for the opening of the Second or Sacred Lodge. It is definitely a Masonic epoch as this is the T. referenced in the Craft Lodge ritual and the same T. that was completed and dedicated in the MEM degree.

Ussher's date for the return of the Children of Israel from their Babylonian captivity is 536 B.C.; deduct this from 4004 and we have 3468. The lecture gives the date for the opening of the third or Grand and Royal Lodge as 3469; this matches Ussher's date when we allow for the words used in the lecture, "after the return of the Israelites from their captivity in Babylon".

Historically, we know that the second great T. also didn't survive. The Traditional lecture informs us that the second T. was destroyed by the Romans under Titus in the 70th year of the present era, or 70 A.D.

Companions, man must now have a new T. of life and that new T. is the heart of man. It's important to remember that the first and second temples, both earthly temples, served God for awhile and then were destroyed. So it is with the temple of life which we are building within ourselves to the service of the M.H. It shall last for a while and then pass away, and in its passing, make way for the temple of the New Life in that undiscovered country from whose Bourne no traveller returns.

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Sources: Fifty Royal Arch Questions Answered, Harry Mendoza
Annals of the Old Testament From the beginning of the World, James Ussher, 1560
Book of the Work, Grand Chapter of Royal Arch Masons of Canada in the Province of Ontario