Zerubbabel and his day

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Who is Zerubbabel and why do we celebrate him as Royal Arch Masons? On what day do we/should we celebrate Zerubbabel day? As Royal Arch Masons we all should be familiar with the importance Zerubbabel plays in our ritual, but most of us know very little about who and what he did. Our Chapters are “erected to God and dedicated to Zerubbabel,” but who was this man? I hope to answer these questions and more during this paper.

Zerubbabel, the name is either the Hebrew meaning of “begotten of (in) Babylon” or it is the Assyrian-Babylonian meaning of “the seed or offspring of Babylon.” There is little known about him but we do know is that he appears in the bible 25 times. Zerubbabel is found in the canonical books of Zechariah, Haggai, Ezra and Nehemiah. He was the ninth direct generation descendant of King David and in the blood line of Jesus. He is generally called the son of Shealtiel (Ezra 3:2,8; 5:2; Nehemiah 12:1; Haggai 1:1,12,14; Matthew 1:12; Luke 3:27); but in 1 Chronicles 3:19 he is called the son of Pedaiah, the brother of Shealtiel and the grandson of Jeconiah.

Zerubbabel standing in the tribe of Judah at the time of the first return from Babylon remains unclear. There are some historians that question whether or not Zerubbabel went at the time of the first return from Babylon because of a dispute about his identity. A number of explanations have been proposed, including: the two are the same person; Sheshbazzar was in fact Shenazzar, Zerubbabel’s uncle (mentioned in Chronicles); Sheshbazzar began the work and Zerubbabel finished it. Whatever may be the answer he was of blood relationship to Jeconiah, Zerubbabel clearly accompanied Sheshbazzar in the first return, and held a position of authority among the exiles and as the Scriptures teach, and Zerubbabel was the legal successor in the line of King David.

In the very first year of his reign, Cyrus summoned the most notable of the Jews to appear before him, and he gave them permission to return and rebuild the Temple at Jerusalem. However, not all Jews returned to their homeland, many thousands had prospered, and elected to stay in Babylonia. When the exiles, arrived back to their homeland they, found the land in a state of desolation and waste. They had to begin from scratch in their building program and to begin life anew. In the second month of the second year of the return they laid the foundation of the Temple, but the opposition of "the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin" caused the Temple consequently to remain in an unfinished state until the second year of the reign of Darius.

Darius appears to have had, like Cyrus, a great friendship for the Israelites, and especially for Zerubbabel, with whom he was well acquainted in his youth. We are informed, as an evidence of this that, when a private man, he made a vow, that if he should ever ascend the throne, he would restore all the vessels of the Temple that had been retained by Cyrus. According to I Esdras IV. 13-63, (followed by Josephus ("Ant." xi. 3, 5-9)), a story is told to the effect that Zerubbabel
commended himself to the king's notice by his ready wit, receiving as his reward permission and the Kings assistance and protection in rebuilding the Temple. After this encounter Zerubbabel suddenly disappears from Masonic and Biblical history.

Now that we discussed who Zerubbabel was. When should we as Royal Arch Masons celebrate him? Doing various searches on the internet I have found several dates but no real explanation as to why that date was selected. Some keep the date (whatever the month) due to the tradition of the first Zerubbabel day that their Chapter/Grand Chapter had while others, have changed their date because “this date is more in-keeping with research of the initial observance of Zerubbabel Day”.

So where should we start? My research has led me to such books as: The book of the Chapter (1870) where Albert Pike states, “... Documents connected with Royal Arch Masonry are dated from the era of the building of the second temple and the time of that important discovery which gave origin to the degree...” and the book, The Story of the Royal Arch by William Harvey (1919). In which he states, “The era of Royal Arch Masonry commences with the year in which Companions assume that Zerubbabel began to build the Second Temple”.

Before we go any further I think it would be prudent to explain the Jewish/Hebrew calendar.

In Second Temple times, the Hebrew calendar worked on an observational basis. They employed a lunar seven day weeks, which ended with the Sabbath on the seventh day. In this system the weeks did not continue in a regular cycle regardless of the moon. Each month has four weeks, the beginning with the New Moon. The beginning of each lunar month was decided on the basis of two eye witnesses testifying to the Sanhedrin to having seen the new lunar crescent at sunset.

Note what one authority says, "Originally, the New Moon was not fixed by astronomical calculation, but was solemnly proclaimed after witnesses had testified to the reappearance of the crescent of the moon"

The present Jewish calendar uses an established a fixed calendar that dates back to the fourth century and is based on mathematical and astronomical calculations. This calendar standardized the length of months and the addition of months over the course of a 19 year cycle, so that the lunar calendar realigns with the solar years

Although the Jewish New Year is on the first of the Jewish month Tishrei (around September), the Torah refers to the Jewish months as beginning from Nissan (around March), the month in which the Jewish people left Egypt. The Jewish months are: 1.Nisan (30 days), 2.Iyar (29 days), 3.Sivan (30 days), 4.Tammuz (29 days), 5.Av (30 days), 6.Elul (29 days), 7.Tishrei (30 days), 8.Cheshvan (29 or 30 days), 9.Kislev (29 or 30 days), 10.Tevet (29 days), 11.Shevat (30 days), and 12.Adar (29 days). In the leap years an additional month, Adar I (30 days) is added after Shevat, and the regular Adar is referred to as "Adar II". So…this might be a little confusing so please see the table below for a better understanding.
We will now explore three different times in which chapters are celebrating “Z” day. With the books stated above and other research material I will attempted to reason why these dates were chosen.

**June**

“Zerubbabel, assisted by these advisers, proceeded to arrange his followers in such a form as would enable them most safely and expeditiously to traverse the long and dangerous road from Babylon to Jerusalem, which latter place they reached after a journey of four months, on the 22nd of June, 535 years before the birth of Christ”.

For those that celebrate “Z” day in June, the return to the Promised Land could be their motivation for this date. It is said Zerubbabel led the first (debatable) wave of Jews back to Jerusalem. I have searched high and low for the exactness of this date proposed by Bro. Pike but could not find resource that can back up this date. The date of the return is generally thought to have been between 538 and 520 BC which can be attributed to the canonical book of Ezra.

**September- October**

And when the seventh month was come, and the children of Israel were in the towns, the people gathered themselves together as one man to Jerusalem. Then stood up Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and his brethren the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and his brethren, and builded the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings thereon, as it is written in the law of Moses the man of God.
Ezra 3:1-2

In the second year of King Darius, on the first day of the sixth month, the word of the LORD came through the prophet Haggai to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest. Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, This people say, The time is not come, the time that the LORD'S house should be built. Then came the word of the LORD by Haggai the prophet, saying, Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled houses, and this house lie waste?

Haggai 1:1-4

So the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of the whole remnant of the people. They came and began to work on the house of the LORD Almighty, their God, on the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month in the second year of King Darius.

Haggai 1:14-15

So we see by the passages above that when Zerubbabel and the exiles came to Jerusalem, the temple altar was erected in the seventh month (Tishri, September-October). Not only had the building of the altar but these also begun first sacrifices of the “second temple period”. Also on this date the prophecies of Haggai prompted Zerubbabel and Joshua the high priest in initiating the resumption of the building of the Temple which had been badly neglected since its foundations had been laid.

April-May

Now in the second year of their coming unto the house of God at Jerusalem, in the second month, began Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and the remnant of their brethren the priests and the Levites, and all they that were come out of the captivity unto Jerusalem; and appointed the Levites, from twenty years old and upward, to set forward the work of the house of the LORD.

Ezra 3:8

Now there are several avenues we pursued, with the final one being the reason I believe we celebrate the Highest Day of Royal Arch Masonry, Zerubbabel Day. We see in the passage above that the day of celebration was when the foundation was laid in the second month (which was Zif/Iyar, April-May). I will now return to The book of the Chapter (1870) where Albert Pike states, “... Documents connected with Royal Arch Masonry are dated from the era of the building of the second temple and the time of that important discovery which gave origin to the degree...” and the book, The Story of the Royal Arch by William Harvey (1919). In which he states, “The era of Royal Arch Masonry commences with the year in which Companions assume that Zerubbabel began to build the Second Temple.”
This day should be remembered not only as Zerubbabel's Day, but it should be remembered as
lying of the foundation of the House of the Lord.

"And it came to pass in the four hundred and eighth year after the children of Israel were
come out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel, in the month Zif,
which [is] the second month, that he began to build the house of the LORD."

(1Kings 6:1)

I believe this time frame is when we should celebrate Zerubbabel day. There are some that want
to affix a specific date to this day as April 24 or 27 of each year, with the celebration coming on
the Sunday closest to it. Whether this is wrong or right I am not here to say but I think we might
want to stay closer look or think about tying the date closer to the Hebrew calendar (or to the
nearest Sabbath day that coincides with that date). The day that is/should be celebrated is the 1st
of Iyar (the day the First and Second Temple foundation stone was laid) has been/will be:

- Thursday, April 15, 2010
- Thursday, May 5, 2011
- Monday, April 23, 2012
- Thursday, April 11, 2013
- Thursday, May 1, 2014
- Monday, April 20, 2015

As this lecture comes to end it is my hope that you have a greater appreciation and understanding
of who Zerubbabel was and why we celebrate Zerubbabel day.

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