

Freemasonry

By Ron Rhodes

Other names: Masonry, Masonic Lodge, The Lodge.

Founders: Though the origin of Freemasonry is debated, it appears that Anglican clergymen James Anderson, George Payne, and Theophilus Desaguliers played a founding role.

Founding date: Apparently 1717 A.D.

Location of groups today: About half the Grand Lodges and two-thirds of the Freemasons in the world are in the United States. Lodges also exist in England, Ireland, Scotland, Holland, Germany, France, and other European countries.

Sacred Scriptures: The Christian Bible, the Hindu Vedas, the Muslim Quran, and Scriptures of other religions, all of which are said to teach the same ethical truths.

Respected publications: *A Comprehensive View of Freemasonry* and *Coil's Masonic Encyclopedia*, both by Henry Wilson Coil; *A Manual of the Lodge* and *Encyclopedia of Freemasonry*, both by Albert Mackey; *Morals and Dogma*, by Albert Pike; *The Religion of Masonry: An Interpretation*, by Joseph Fort Newton.

Organizational structure: There are three degrees in Blue Lodge Freemasonry: Entered Apprentice, Fellow Craft, and Master Mason. One can then pursue the higher degrees of the York Rite or the Scottish Rite.

HISTORY

The origin of Freemasonry is shrouded in deep mystery and wild legends. Some Masons believe Masonic “light” is alluded to in the biblical creation account when God said, “Let there be light” (Gen. 1:1-3).¹ Other Masons claim Freemasonry goes back to the time of Adam and Eve. Following their sin, they constructed loin coverings out of fig leaves—allegedly the first Masonic “aprons.”²

Other Masons date Freemasonry back to the time of Solomon, who utilized the skills of stone masons in erecting the temple in Jerusalem (1 Kings 5; 2 Chron. 2:3-16).³ These argue that Hiram, the King of Tyre, aided Solomon in the building of the Jerusalem Temple, supplying trees, carpenters, and masons for this project. Solomon was allegedly the Grand Master of the Masonic Lodge at Jerusalem. Still other Masons find Freemasonry’s origin in ancient pagan religions. Such mystery religions existed in Egypt, Chaldea, and Phoenicia, among other lands.⁴

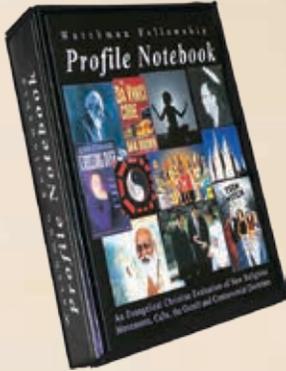
Despite such claims, documented history reveals that Freemasonry formally began in London, England in A.D. 1717, due to the efforts of Anglican clergymen James Anderson, George Payne, and Theophilus Desaguliers.⁵ This was when the Grand Lodge of London was first organized.

This lodge featured “Speculative Masonry,” which is distinct from “Operative Masonry.” The backdrop is that during the Middle Ages and after, “operative Masons” worked at specific trades—as builders, stone masons, and architects engaged in construction work.⁶ They were *working* Masons engaged in constructing great churches and cathedrals.⁷ They eventually formed a guild as a means of protection and to enhance their professional credibility.

As to why they were called “Freemasons,” some believe that because they worked with “free stone” (which could be easily carved), they became known as “free stone masons”—later shortened to “Freemasons.” Others believe they were called Freemasons because they were free to move around from city to city, or country to country. Others say that perhaps these were just free men as opposed to serfs. Still others say that as traveling workmen they were given freedom in the towns in which they worked.⁸

The Grand Lodge founded in London in 1717 involved not “Operative Masonry” (involving professional builders) but rather “Speculative Masonry” (*nonbuilding* masons). Such Speculative

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Masons seek to metaphorically construct a spiritual temple in their hearts, pure and spotless, a fit dwelling place for God.⁹ Many of the symbols used in Masonic Lodges are actually tools that old stone masons used in construction, but they are now allegorically interpreted to refer to the development of some particular virtue in the life of the modern Mason.

A RELIGION?

Masons disagree amongst themselves on whether Freemasonry is a religion. Some say it is a religion because it requires belief in a Supreme Being and actively involves temples, doctrines, altars, worship, and even chaplains. Freemasonry is said to be a religion without a creed, a religion that finds truth in *all* religions.¹⁰

Other Masons—the *majority*—deny Freemasonry is a religion. They argue that the differences between Freemasonry and religion are far greater than any similarities. They point out that the term “religion” implies new revelation, a plan of salvation, a theology, dogmas, sacraments, clergy, and ways of communicating with God. Freemasonry does none of these things.¹¹ These view Freemasonry more as a philosophy or system of morals and ethics.¹²

INITIATION RITUALS

Following the opening of a Lodge meeting, the formal business commences. Part of that business relates to new candidates seeking to join. The candidate is not considered unless he is a worthy individual who has been vouched for by another Mason in good standing. The candidate’s petition is reviewed, as are his character and reputation, and a vote is taken in the lodge. A single negative vote, as evidenced by a “black ball,” is enough to bar the candidate’s petition.¹³ But if no black ball appears, the candidate is declared duly elected.¹⁴

The candidate promptly goes through the ritual for the Entered Apprentice degree, which is the first degree of the Blue Lodge. The ritual is bizarre and elaborate, and symbolizes the initiate—said to be in spiritual darkness—coming to the Masonic Lodge for “light.” With his left hand upon the holy book of his choice, the initiate promises to keep the secrets of the lodge, and takes a blood initiation oath (with a penalty of a cut throat) toward that end.¹⁵ Initiation rituals into the Fellow Craft degree and the Master Mason degree have similar violent penalties for betraying the secrets of the Lodge.¹⁶ The candidate is given a lambskin as an emblem of innocence that points to the purity of life necessary for one seeking entrance into the celestial lodge above (heaven).

TEACHINGS

The Bible: Masons believe the Bible is written in symbols that can be understood only through esoteric interpretations;¹⁷ an approach which seeks to uncover hidden meanings within the symbols. Though the Bible is a significant book, it is not the exclusive Word of God. Masons often refer to the Bible as one of many symbols of God’s will—others include the Muslim Quran and Hindu Vedas. In fact, all holy books are acceptable within the confines of any Masonic Lodge. These books provide not just religious truth but *moral* truth and hence constitute ethical guides by which to govern one’s life. This is the important thing for the Mason.¹⁸

God: Masons describe God by such terms as the “Great Architect of the Universe,” the “Supreme Being,” the “Grand Geometrician of the Universe,” the “Grand Artificer of the Universe,” and “God, the Creator, Author, and Architect of the Universe, Omnipotent, Omniscient, and Omnipresent.”¹⁹ They often say God is infinitely beyond our ability to comprehend, and hence it is inappropriate for mere humans to fight about how to define Him.

Masons often speak of God’s “all-seeing eye,” which is viewed as a symbol of the omnipresent deity.²⁰ They note it is the same symbol the Egyptians used to represent the god Osiris in all their temples.²¹ Some Masons believe this all-seeing eye is alluded to in Proverbs 15:3: “The eyes of the LORD are everywhere, keeping watch on the wicked and the good” (see also Ps. 34:15; 121:4).

It is believed that Jews, Christians, Hindus, Muslims, and those of other faiths all worship the same all-seeing God using different names. God is “the nameless one of a hundred names.”²² He “is equally present with the pious Hindoo [sic] in the temple, the Jew in the synagogue, the Mohammedan in the mosque, and the Christian in the church.”²³

Freemasonry *as an institution*, however, does not affirm the Christian belief in the Trinity. Masons believe that if Freemasonry affirmed belief in the Trinity, that would amount to sponsoring the Christian religion, since Christianity is the only religion that holds to this doctrine. The Masonic policy is that “no phrase or terms should be used in a Masonic service that would arouse sectarian feelings or wound the religious sensibilities of any Freemason.”²⁴

In the Royal Arch degree of the York Rite, the real name of God is revealed to be *Jabulon*. This is a compound word derived from “Ja” (for Jehovah), joined with “Bel” or “Bul” (for Baal, the ancient Canaanite God), and “On” (for Osiris, the ancient Egyptian mystery god).²⁵ Masons say that “in this compound name an attempt is made to show by a coordination of divine names... the unity, identity and harmony of the Hebrew, Assyrian and Egyptian god-ideas.”²⁶

Jesus: The deity of Christ is either denied or greatly downplayed within Masonic circles. “Christian Masons” may consider Jesus to be divine, but they typically choose not to invoke His name when praying. Masons are instructed to pray more generally “in the Most Holy and Precious name.”²⁷ If the name of Jesus were invoked during prayer, then others from different religious persuasions would seek to invoke the name of their deity during prayer. Since Masons seek to avoid religious disputes, invoking *any* name—including that of Jesus—is avoided.

Jesus is typically regarded by Masons as a great moral teacher and ethical philosopher in the same league with other great men like Socrates.²⁸ He stood for virtue. Some Masons believe the reason Jesus was put to death was because of His high morality.²⁹ Though Jesus is admired, any suggestion that He is the only way to God is outright rejected by most Masons. Such an idea is viewed as intolerant, and intolerance is not tolerated within the halls of Masonic Lodges. Masons believe there are many acceptable paths to God, all based on attaining a high level of morality.

Salvation: Masons deny the Christian doctrine of original sin and reject any suggestion that humans are depraved.³⁰ Humans are viewed merely as imperfect. They make mistakes. If a person works hard at keeping the principles and teachings of the Masonic Lodge—if he lives *ethically*—he will finally be ushered into the “Celestial Lodge Above,” where the “Supreme Architect of the Universe” resides.³¹

Masons use symbols like the gavel to represent the goal of removing the “rough edges” from a person’s overall good character. The Mason’s heightened morality is said to be evidenced in their charity and involvement in civic duties.

Occultic Beliefs: There is an occult connection in Freemasonry, though many Masons—particularly those who consider themselves “Christian Masons”—may be unaware of this. The 19th through the 28th degrees of the Scottish Rite, in particular, involve such occultic elements as the development of psychic powers, telepathy, altered states of consciousness, mysticism, Kabbalism (an occultic art and mystical system of interpreting Scripture that began among some first-century Jews), Rosicrucianism (a mystical brotherhood involving occult powers and spirit contact), and hermetic philosophy (alchemy).

Moreover, Isis, Serapis, and Osiris are pagan deities affiliated with ancient Egyptian mystery religions that are mentioned regularly in Masonic literature. Other Egyptian deities, such as the great sun god Re, Apis, Thoth, Phtha, Hermes, Orpheus, and Horus, among others, are also regularly cited. Masonry is viewed as “a successor of the mysteries,” and is said to be “identical with the ancient mysteries.”³²

BIBLICAL RESPONSE

Rituals: Masonic rituals which position initiates as being in darkness, and needing the light of Freemasonry, are inappropriate for Christians who have been redeemed by Jesus, the Light of the world (John 12:46) who has brought us into the kingdom of light (Col. 1:12–14). God’s children walk in the light, not in darkness (1 John 1:4–7; see also Eph. 5:8; 2 Pet. 1:3–4; Ps. 119:105). Moreover, the penalty for not keeping the secrets of the lodge (cutting one’s throat) is barbaric and offensive not just to Christians but to all civilized people.

The Bible: The Bible is not one of many holy books, but is rather the unique Word of God that is both inspired (“God-breathed”) and inerrant (2 Pet. 1:21; 2 Tim. 3:16–17; 1 Cor. 2:13). The Bible is therefore the supreme and infallible authority for the believer (Matt. 4:4–10; 5:18; 22:29; Luke 16:17; John 10:35; Gal. 1:12). The folly of saying all holy books teach the same truths is evident in that the Christian Bible, Hindu Vedas, and Muslim Quran teach diametrically opposing concepts on God, Jesus, sin, salvation, and the afterlife. If one holy book is correct (the Bible), the others are necessarily incorrect.

God: The only true God is the God of the Bible (Isa. 43:10; 44:8). His unique name is Yahweh (Ex. 3:14–15), not *Jabulon* (a name rooted in idolatry—Judges 2:17; 3:7; 1 Kings 18:28; Jer. 19:4–5). Moreover, the world religions do *not* worship the same God with different names. While the Bible teaches there is one God (Isa. 44:6, 9; John 5:44; 17:3; Rom. 3:29–30; 16:27; Gal. 3:20; Eph. 4:6; 1 Tim. 2:5; James 2:19) who is triune (Matt. 3:16–17; 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14), Islam denies the Trinity,

denies God can have a Son, and exalts Allah. Meanwhile, Hinduism espouses millions of gods all subsumed under the one monistic reality of Brahman.³³

Jesus: The biblical Jesus was more than a good moral teacher. No *mere* moral teacher would ever claim the destiny of the world lay in His hands, or that people would spend eternity in heaven or hell depending on whether they believed in Him (John 6:26-40). The only example this would provide would be one of lunacy. And for Jesus to convince people that He was God (John 8:58) and the Savior of the world (Luke 19:10) when He really was not would be the ultimate *immorality*.³⁴

Jesus' deity is evidenced by biblical names of deity being ascribed to Him, including the Old Testament word for God (*Elohim*—Isa. 9:6; 40:3); the Old Testament word for LORD (*Yahweh*—Isa. 40:3), the New Testament word for God (*Theos*—John 20:28; Acts 16:31-34; Titus 2:13; 1 Pet. 1:1); and the New Testament word for Lord (*Kurios*—Phil. 2:9-11). Moreover, Jesus demonstrated the attributes of deity, including self-existence (John 1:3; Col. 1:17), immutability (Heb. 1:10-12; 13:8); omnipresence (Matt. 18:20), omniscience (Matt. 17:27; Luke 5:4,6; John 7:29; 8:55; 10:15; 16:30; 17:25), and omnipotence (Mark 1:29-31; Luke 8:25; John 11:1-44; Col. 1:16-17). Jesus also did what only God can do (miracles) (see, for example, John 11:43-44). He also received worship that belongs only to God (Heb. 1:6; Matt. 2:11; 8:2; 9:18; see also Ex. 34:14; Deut. 6:13).

Salvation: Human beings are not just imperfect but are sinners (Ps. 51:5; Isa. 64:6; Rom. 3:10; 5:12,19; see also 1 Cor. 15:21-22; Eph. 2:3). Jesus said man's big problem is the sin *in the heart* (Matt. 15:19). While Freemasonry focuses attention on external ethics, it can do virtually nothing to cure the ills of the *inner* human heart. Only Christ can do that.

People's lives do not need an external Masonic *tune-up*, they need a *brand new engine*. That is, they need to become brand new creatures (2 Cor. 5:17), and that can only happen with a personal relationship with Christ that begins at the new birth (John 3:3-5). Salvation can never be obtained through ethical living or good works (Rom. 4:1-25; Gal. 3:6-14), but is a grace-gift received through faith in Christ (Rom. 3:26). "A man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law" (Rom. 3:28; 5:1).

Scripture portrays Jesus as the *only* way of salvation. Jesus said He is humanity's *only* means of coming into a relationship with God (John 14:6). This was confirmed by those who followed Him (Acts 4:12; 1 Tim. 2:5). And Jesus warned His followers about those who would try to set forth a different "Christ" (Matt. 24:4-5).

Occultic Beliefs: God condemns *all* forms of occultism (Ex. 22:18; Lev. 19:26,31; 20:27; Deut. 18:9-12; 1 Sam. 28:3). Many aspects of Freemasonry are thus off-limits to the Christian.

Notes

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- ³ John Robinson, *Born in Blood* (New York: Evans, 1989), 178.
- ⁴ Robinson, 177.
- ⁵ Michael Baigent and Richard Leigh, *The Temple and the Lodge* (New York: Arcade, 1989), p. 126. See Henry Wilson Coil, *A Comprehensive View of Freemasonry* (Richmond: Macoy, 1973), 5.
- ⁶ James Rongstad, *The Lodge: How to Respond* (Saint Louis: CPH, 1995), 14.
- ⁷ Harold Voorhis, *Facts for Freemasons* (Richmond: Macoy, 1979), 10.
- ⁸ Rongstad, 14.
- ⁹ Albert Mackey, *A Manual of the Lodge* (New York: Maynard, Merrill, and Co., 1898), 35.
- ¹⁰ Coil, *A Comprehensive View of Freemasonry*, 234.
- ¹¹ Robinson, 255.
- ¹² Richard Thorn, *The Boy Who Cried Wolf* (New York: Evans, 1994), 83.
- ¹³ Robinson, 202.
- ¹⁴ Malcolm Duncan, *Duncan's Masonic Ritual and Monitor* (New York: David McKay, n.d.), 9.
- ¹⁵ Robinson, 206-207.
- ¹⁶ Robinson, 217.
- ¹⁷ Thorn, 70.
- ¹⁸ Albert Mackey, *A Manual of the Lodge* (New York: Maynard, Merrill, and Co., 1898), 30.
- ¹⁹ Jim Tresner; cited in George Mather and Larry Nichols, *Masonic Lodge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 41.
- ²⁰ Albert Mackey, *Encyclopedia of Freemasonry* (New York: Masonic History, 1920), 48.
- ²¹ Mackey, *Encyclopedia of Freemasonry*, 48.
- ²² Coil, *A Comprehensive View of Freemasonry*, 192.
- ²³ Albert Mackey, *Revised Encyclopedia of Freemasonry* (Richmond: Macoy, 1966), 1:409-10.
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- ²⁶ Martin Wagner, *Freemasonry: An Interpretation* (Columbiana: Missionary Service and Supply, n.d.), 338-39.
- ²⁷ Jack Harris, *Freemasonry: The Invisible Cult in Our Midst* (Chattanooga: Global, 1983), 112.
- ²⁸ Albert Pike, *Morals and Dogma* (Montana: Kessinger, n.d.), 540.
- ²⁹ Pike, 308.
- ³⁰ H.L. Haywood, *The Great Teachings of Masonry* (Richmond: Macoy, 1971), 138-39.
- ³¹ Rongstad, 22.
- ³² Pike, 22, 23, 255, 290-91, 364-65, 376.
- ³³ Lewis Hopfe, *Religions of the World* (New York: Macmillan, 1991), 98.
- ³⁴ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1960), 40-41.



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