

Gedaliah- Overlooked & Yet Pivotal-but which one?

Jacob W. Thompson, KYCH

Grand Council of Cryptic Masons of Missouri Education Committee

The Super Excellent Master Degree presents us with perhaps one of the more eye-catching (see what I did there) and somber tales regarding the city of Jerusalem, it's leaders, the Jewish people, and Solomon's Temple. While we often focus on Zedekiah, the "twentieth and last king of Judah"¹ or Nebuchadnezzar, the degree does present to us several other persons of great import in a historic sense, and among those is Gedaliah². Yet as with many degrees a name and a historical tie in are not always 1:1 and Biblical scriptures give us several Gedaliahs, two of which most appropriately fit the circumstances of our work, and to explore them we shall now endeavor, Gedaliah, Son of Pashur and Gedaliah, son of Ahikam.

The Super Excellent Master Degree describes Gedaliah to us as Jewish Prince and from our perspective he appears to be among those in Zedekiah's retinue and a part of the bureaucracy of Judean administration. Further the current ritual makes it appear that he reveres Jeremiah and his position as a prophet (rather than one of the historic Gedaliahs we'll touch on later.) He isn't just a hapless government official in the work though- his sadness conveys the people's sorrow at the casting off of the Divines path by an misguided(or better yet perhaps evil)l monarch and he rises by a brief mention in the end of the degree to become the Governor of Judea. He is charged by Nebuchadnezzar to care for the poor left in the wake of the war and give protection to Jeremiah.

Additionally, it is worth noting that the name "Gedaliah" carries the meaning "Yahweh is Great" or a variation thereof and perhaps that alludes to his nature in service and leadership and the role he plays in providing even a glimmer of hope to the people at a moment of need. Yet taking this into consideration as well as the other details we are still a bit murky in which Gedaliah we are truly involved with in a historic and scriptural sense- and perhaps- does it even really matter?

Gedaliah, the son of Pashur is a prince of the Judean royal house and he is included among,

The princes [who] said unto the king, We beseech thee, let this man be put to death: for thus he weakeneth the hands of the men of war that remain in this city, and the hands of all the people, in speaking such words unto them: for this man seeketh not the welfare of this people, but the hurt.³

The words of these nobles swayed King Zedekiah to put the prophet Jeremiah to death, and that inevitably was only stayed by the hand of a palace eunuch speaking and acting on his behalf.⁴ As such Gedaliah is perhaps not the most noble of figures in his persecution of a prophet, but



Seal of Gedalah, son of Pashur-
Discovered in 2008

¹ *Cryptic Masonry: A Manual of the Council*, A. Mackey, Pg. 87

² Also spelled as Gedalia, Gedallah, Gedalya, or Gedalyah.

³ Holy Bible, KJV, Jeremiah, Ch. 38 v.4

⁴ Ebedmelech the Ethiopian

he is among the royal house and those advisors who would likely have Zedekiah's ear and be present in his audience chambers.

Following the events portrayed in the Super Excellent Master Degree, Gedaliah, son of Ahikam, is appointed Governor of the Judah and the province which it then became under the Persian Monarch.⁵ Gedaliah's appointment was well received by the Jewish people, many of whom had fled the region. These scattered masses took his appointment as a positive sign and returned from neighboring states where they had hid for a time. Sadly, Gedaliah's appointment did not sit entirely well with every member of the populace. Ishmael ben Nethaniah, a former member of the royal family, along with ten companions sought out and assassinated the new governor and many of his supporters along with the Babylonian garrison then present in Jerusalem.⁶ The expected wrath of the Great Monarch being clear from past occasions, those Judeans left in the wake fled hastily to Egypt "for they were afraid of the Chaldees."⁷ Gedaliah's assassination and the ensuing aftereffects with the final fall of Jewish rule in that time period and the ensuing emptying of the region is now observed by those of the Jewish faith as the "Fast of Gedaliah", occurring on the 3rd day of Tishri.



Gedaliah is killed while eating with Ishmael and his men, Jan Luyken, 1704

⁵ Holy Bible, KJV, 2 Kings Ch. 25 v.22 "And as for the people that remained in the land of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had left, even over them he made Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, the ruler.

⁶ Holy Bible, KJV, 2 Kings Ch. 25. V.25 "Ishmael.., of the royal seed, cam and ten men with him, and smote Gedaliah, that he died, and the Jews and Chaldees that were with him at Mitzpah." Also see Jeremiah Ch 41 v1-9 for further details

⁷ Holy Bible, KJV, 2 Kings, Ch 25 v.26

Yet as already noted we must ask ourselves- is our Gedaliah, one of the two noted in the scriptures and found in tradition, or a hybrid, or a fiction all to itself. Considering such machinations on who exactly was Gedaliah or rather which one he was, Albert Mackey postulates that,

I think there can be no doubt that the founders of the degree intended the second officer of the Council to represent the former, and not the latter; Gedaliah the son of Pashur, and not Gedaliah, the son of Ahikam; the Prince of Judah, and not the Governor.⁸ Mackey's comments make sense on the whole as early Monitors that include the degree do not include the expanded royal court of today with Pashur or Zephaniah, but only contain "Companion Gedaliah" and various other underlings, all of lesser purpose.

Gedaliah, son of Pashur was of the Royal Court, an advisor of Zedekiah and thus present at the destruction of the city, temple and during the assaults. As such he would seem the mostly likely candidate to fit the mold with our ritual. Gedaliah, son of Ahikam, who served after the invasion as Satrap and Governor, would have been someone the Babylonian monarch trusted, and felt confident giving authority. Albert Mackey postulates that he was of the stock of Jewish folk taken into captivity during the wars before and thus under the Chaldeans he was raised, and having their trust came with the invasion force to then take up an appointment of leadership as a Jew in the favor of Nebuchadnezzar.⁹

Inherently we may look at the degree of Super Excellent Master and contemplate the lessons of its various parts. The layers of tradition, scripture, and history leave much more to our consideration. To such circumstances, we must contemplate Gedaliah. Whatever the case may be on who was who, we can always fall back to some sound wisdom from that insightful mason and scholar of the American Rite of Freemasonry, Albert Mackey, who tells us in his monitor, "Even in the composition of a fictitious work we should observe consistency, respect probabilities, and by all means avoid an absurdity."¹⁰

⁸ *Cryptic Masonry: A Manual of the Council*, A. Mackey, Pg. 92

⁹ *Cryptic Masonry: A Manual of the Council*, A. Mackey, Pg. 91

¹⁰ *Cryptic Masonry: A Manual of the Council*, A. Mackey, Pg. 92