

Bricks and Stones

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We hear much about the use of ashlar and stones, but we never hear any mention of the use of bricks in Freemasonry. Why is this?

Our ancient operative brethren seldom used bricks. Ancient stonemasons considered bricks to be inferior materials. As such, they were almost universally avoided as unsuitable for use in building sacred temples and cathedrals. This thinking was made for practical reasons as well as spiritual ones.

From a practical standpoint bricks are physically inferior to stone. A brick is not as strong and not as weather resilient. In ancient times, bricks were made by unskilled workers using mud pitch from rivers. The mud was mixed with straw chaff and then placed into molds and dried by the sun. Mud bricks quite literally started to deteriorate the first time it rained, and they quickly failed on a structural basis.

Around the time of the building of the Tower of Babel, the manufacturing process improved and the bricks were fire dried in a kiln. This made them much stronger and more consistent. Various other materials were added that gave them improved permanence. Nimrod was convinced his tower would stand forever as a great monument because it was made from this new type of bricks, although it was poorly engineered and was built by unskilled workers and slaves.

24 Modern bricks are even stronger and almost completely weather
25 resistant; however, many stonemasons yet refused to use them. Many
26 are quick to point out that the craft of stonemasonry is not the same as
27 the craft of brick masonry, and that the two should not be considered
28 synonymous.

29 A brick is made by man and is made according to man's plan and
30 design. There are different dimensions for specific types of bricks. Other
31 than size, bricks are all much the same. If you have a ton of Clinker
32 bricks, each individual brick is essentially the same as the next, and one
33 can be substituted for another in the overall plan of a building without
34 consequences.

35 In ancient times, bricks were made by the most lowly of workers
36 because it required only physical strength and very little actual skill or
37 artisanship. The old, the weak and the diseased slaves were often
38 assigned to the mud pits where they would toil to make bricks before
39 dying. Troublesome and rebellious slaves could easily have spirit broken
40 by being assigned to work in the brick kilns and being forced to lug
41 heavy loads of finished bricks. Brick making was far from an honored
42 and skilled craft.

43 Bricks require reinforcement with mortar if they are to be stacked
44 greater than a few layers. Without mortar to contain them, they fall and
45 topple as weight is applied. The mortar is used not only to hold the

46 bricks together, but it also becomes a part of the overall structure being
47 crafted.

48 From a spiritual standpoint, every stone is made by G-d and each is
49 made according to His Divine Plan. Each stone has different dimensions
50 and shape — no two are ever alike. Every rough ashlar was selected,
51 mined, hewn and fitted by special craftsmen. The masons skilled to work
52 in stone were not slaves, but were free men — considered honorable and
53 skilled workmen. As such, they were granted special wages and privileges
54 whereby they could freely travel between kingdoms with very few
55 restrictions.

56 Unlike brickwork, which could be done by nearly anyone physically
57 capable of lifting a brick and stacking it upon another, the secrets of
58 stone masonry were carefully protected and guarded so that the craft
59 could protect its business interests. They devised an organized system
60 whereby the craft could train new apprentices, test them and provide
61 skilled journeymen. Once tried, tested and proven, the most worthy
62 artisans were given the more advanced secrets of the trade and earned
63 the title of a master stonemason.

64 It is also interesting to note that proper stone masonry requires little
65 or no mortar to hold together. When skilled artisans cut stones to exact
66 nicety, they require no mortar to give the stones or the overall structure
67 strength — the strength originates in the nature of stone itself. If mortar

68 is used at all, it is a fine thin grade used to seal joints to make them
69 watertight or airtight. As an example, consider the Washington
70 Monument. It reaches 555 feet in height and was constructed entirely of
71 fitted stones using no mortar between the stones. A thin coating of
72 mortar was eventually applied to the outside of each joint, but only as a
73 weather seal.

74 The Great Pyramids, the Sphinx, and nearly every other great
75 monument that has withstood the ages of time, were all made from fitted
76 stones that contained no mortar. With very few exceptions, ancient
77 structures made from brick can no longer be found at all. This includes
78 the infamous Tower of Babel, which is quite possibly the largest brick
79 structure ever constructed.

80 Nimrod convinced his people to build a great tower made from bricks.
81 His people became a living allegory for and of the bricks they used: each
82 uniform and all alike. They put forth so much effort into the construction
83 of the tower that all other forms of art, science and worship that make
84 men unique, were all largely ignored. They labored under the illusion
85 that when the tower was completed, they would be rewarded with
86 something material, and that it would provide them with satisfaction.
87 This further creates an allegory that the bricks were held together with
88 the mortar of materialism. Once the Tower reached completion, their
89 work would have been seen as being complete, and by this, they could
90 expect complete fulfillment.

91 The work of the Mason requires no mortar of materialism. His
92 strength is from within, and is created by G-d. His labors are to learn
93 and to improve himself in such a way that he may be found worthy to
94 earn that sublime achievement of being made a Master Mason. As such,
95 the labors of a Mason never ends, and his works are never fully
96 completed. A Mason's duty to the Craft and to his fellow man are ever
97 expanding, and he is pleased to see good works become his life labors.