Two Pillars

1. Few things in Freemasonry are less understood than the two pillars from the porch of King Solomon's Temple. This presentation is based largely on a Short Talk Bulletin published by the Masonic Service Association of North America nearly three-quarters of a century ago and information found on the Wikipedea.org web page.
2. The pillars I refer to are a fixture in most Masonic lodges. They appear at the entranceway of many Masonic Buildings. It is likely that you passed between, or at least near to, the pillars in this Lodge in order to attend this meeting.
3. Two pillars at the entrance of the porch of King Solomon’s Temple named Boaz and Jachin. Boaz stood on the left (north side) and Jachin stood on the right (South side).
4. The South-North alignment ascribed to Jachin and Boaz allows the following practical astronomical observations without further equipment, assuming only that they were open to the sky at midday. 1. When the shadow of Jachin aligns with Boaz it marks midday: so it might be used to divide the morning and afternoon temple rituals. 2. The last rays of the sun on the tips of the Pillars mark sunset and the end of the day. Dawn is shown similarly. Both have ritual relevance as well as being visible widely in the city. 3. The longest/highest noon shadow of Jachin onto Boaz marks the day of the winter solstice. From this the days to the vernal equinox may be counted in a standardised form, e.g. perhaps thirteen sevens plus a day. This fixes the earliest possible date for 1st Abib and the start of the new religious year. It allows an intercalary month to be accurately predicted in most cases without knowledge of the metonic cycle. 4. At midnight on the night beginning 15th Abib the shadow of Jachin cast by the Passover Moon aligns with Boaz. This marks the moment when the Destroyer liberated the people from slavery in Egypt, founding the nation (Exodus 12 v29).
5. These pillars are so much a part of Masonry that we find written references to them dating as far back as the 1300's. Many of us don't know their meaning, but we still pride ourselves on knowing the details of their structure. We say, for example, that the pillars were cast of molten brass in the clay grounds of Jordan.
6. However, some Masonic scholars believe that the pillars were not brass at all but rather stone.
7. How high were the pillars? A majority of American rituals state that they were thirty-five cubits in height. Some of the others say it was only eighteen. Albert Mackey, in his Encyclopedia of Freemasonry, says they were 27 feet. There are two accounts in the Bible in both 1st Kings and 2nd Chronicles of the building of King Solomon's Temple. In one, the height of the pillars is 18 cubits, in the other 35 cubits. Which measurement is right?
8. Scholars now believe that the Biblical reference to 35 cubits is the total height of both of them and that approximately one half cubit of each was below ground. 18 cubits, minus one-half cubit, is 17 and half cubits. Twice that is 35 cubits.
9. But how long is a cubit? If we accept Mackey’s height of 27 feet we get a cubit that is one and a half feet. A cubit is generally defined as being the length from a man's elbow to the end of his middle finger, a foot and a half, give or take a little. 27 feet divided by a foot and a half is 18.
10. Until 1964, no one had been able to find Zarthan, the clay grounds of Jordan, or any place with evidence of casting activity, near enough to Jerusalem, to have been used for the casting of vessels for the Temple. In 1964 a city was discovered that had been buried for nearly 3000 years that meets all the requirements. It’s now believed that they were cast of brass.
11. ...and he set up the right pillar, and called the name thereof Jachin; and he set up the left pillar, and he called the name thereof Boaz. 1st Kings 7:21 (KJV) Yes, these pillars had names, and that in itself is significant. It suggests that they were not merely adornment – these pillars meant something!
12. It is not important whether they were 18 or 35 cubits in height. It is not important whether or not they had spherical bodies at the top of them. It is not important where they were cast. It is not even important whether they were made of bronze or of stone. What is important is what they represent ...and considering what we know of King Solomon, I suspect that the meaning of those pillars nearly 3000 years ago was the same as it is today. They represent strength and establishment, power and control, the strength of Solomon, ruler of Israel, and his wisdom that we still speak of today. In each of the three degrees we lead the candidate between them. In many Lodges we pass between them each time we enter and leave the Lodge. Power, or strength, in any form can be used for good or evil. Each time we pass through or otherwise see those pillars we should be reminded that control without strength is meaningless; and that strength, without control, produces disaster. The lesson of the pillars is that positive results can only be achieved through a proper application of strength and wisdom.
13. The newly made Fellowcraft reaches the base of the winding stairs by passing between two pillars.

He is expected to climb by strength, and be guided by wisdom. He will need power to progress, but that power must be under control. He will rise by the might that is within him, and arrive at the top through the wisdom he gains along the way.

1. Let us not forget the lesson of the pillars: Control without power is futile; Power without control produces disaster; Success comes from a proper balance of the two; Boaz on the one side and Jachin on the other.