



## The Word

Many times, in the course of a study of the Degrees, have I asked myself the question, why, in the formation of the degrees, and particularly the Royal Arch, did the founders make the search for the “Word” the basis of their work?

What reason did they have for so doing?

## **The Word.**

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. In Him was Life and Life was the Light of Man.” Gospel According to Saint John, 1:1,4

Many times, in the course of a study of the Chapter degrees, have I asked myself the question, why, in the formation of the degrees, and particularly the Royal Arch, did the founders make the search for the “Word” the basis of their work? What reason did they have for so doing? If the Bible was the Great Light from which they worked, was there anything in the Bible to account for this fact, or did the reason therefore reach farther back in history than that remarkable Book? Again, if the Bible, and history, did contain the record of such a search, was there something vital therein which would account for the prominence given it, not only throughout the Chapter degrees, but many other degrees of Masonry?

I fully believe that all these questions should be answered affirmatively, and that it is worth while to spend some time and effort to answer the questions asked above.

I do not pretend that the matters here presented are original. In fact, I will tell you that they are not, but are compilations from the opinions of many great Masonic scholars, historians, archaeologists and others. I will use some quotations from their writings. I hope however, to interest you in the subject, and to get those of you, who do not know it, to take the time to become familiar with it. The subject is worthy of study, and the results of that study will add much to the interest in Masonry and particularly the Chapter degrees.

So, what about the “Need for a Name”?

When man first appeared on earth, many ages ago, he was as the beasts. He had no knowledge, and only instinct and hunger

made him do certain necessary things. As time went on, man from his experience, slowly learned other lessons. He learned there was a sun, moon, the stars, that there was heat and cold, and that certain things were good to eat and others not. He learned to provide food for himself and his family, and, in time, the use of fire, and how to form crude implements. For all these things, it was necessary to supply a name, which he did.

There being in every man a need for some form of religion to satisfy the same, he deified many of the natural phenomena, and to each of these he gave a name. To them he ascribed passions, such as he had, and used means to propitiate his gods, such as he would want done to himself. A ritual was developed for services in honour of these gods, and a priesthood was created to carry out that ritual. Necessarily the members of the priesthood were of higher intelligence. With the development of wealth and the growth of cities, temples for the worship of the gods were built, and a ritual was developed for services in the temples. With the growth of cities and nations came kings. These later became absolute monarchs, whose word meant life or death to the people. Many nations had rulers who were a part of the priesthood or were under the control of that body.

Now each of these gods was given a name, in fact two or more names. Some were used for the people, and the others sacredly guarded by the priests. The same was true of the kings.

As far as "Early Names" are concerned, it is necessary here to distinguish between names, as we now know them, and as they were at that period of history. We had then no given names for a person nor any surname or family name. Your son or daughter would not bear your name, but would be named for some important event, or for some thing that the child might have done. It might have one or more names depending upon the number of incidents of importance in its life. We have all heard of the traditions of naming the children of Native Americans after the

first sighting after the child was born; and the crude jokes that accompany that tradition!

The word name really was used in the sense of fame or renown.

To cite some examples. The name Adam, the first man in the world, simply means "man." Eve was so called because the name means "living" and she was the mother of all living. Cain means "lance" and as the lance was the means by which game was secured the word had a secondary meaning of "to get." Hence Eve called her son Cain because she had begotten him. Abram's name means "exalted father" because he was to be the father of a great nation. Later the "h" was added to the middle of his name to make Abraham which means the "father of a multitude."

Now the great mass of the people was ignorant. They had no knowledge. They were intensely superstitious. The priesthood had all the then known knowledge. For the purpose of keeping this knowledge within their ranks and to keep the people interested in religion, there were developed rituals of temple worship. A young man intending to become a priest had to go through a long training and an initiation before he could become a priest. The priesthood was a closed corporation jealous of its rights.

Royalty was carefully guarded. Many of the kings claimed to be descended from the gods, and to reign over their people by direct command of the gods. Now there was carefully fostered by the priesthood and gradually developed among the people a belief that the name of the king or the gods must not be spoken. It could be used only by the priests in temple worship. The name of the king must not be mentioned. If any one was guilty of the offence of mentioning either the name of a god or of the king, some terrible misfortune would come to him and his family.

It is but a step from this to the belief that the name of any person must be carefully guarded. That to know a man's true name was to give to the knower power over the person whose name he knew. It might be the cause of one's death or might bring to him some serious loss. This belief among the more primitive peoples persists.

Because of this belief, most of the people had two names, one which was in common use, and the other which was sacredly guarded. It was generally believed that a man's name was a part of him and had an important bearing on his character. This belief was current among the Hebrews and had considerable influence in the development of their history. In fact this superstition was carried so far that there are instances in which the true name was possessed only by the parents of the child, for fear that if the child knew his real name he might at some time reveal it to his hurt.

We all know the story of Samson and Delilah. Delilah persuaded Samson to reveal to her his true name. The belief as to the power possessed by one who knew your name was not limited to one nation but was common to all. In Egypt it caused the Pharaohs to build for themselves two tombs. In one, the mummy was placed and in the other the Ka or other self.

### The Superstitions

This superstition went further. It was also believed that if anyone knew the true name of one of the gods, or of the king, either could be compelled to do the bidding of the one who knew the name. All that was necessary was that the name be pronounced with a request for whatever was desired, and it would be forthcoming.

The legendary history of the various nations is full of stories of this type. It is the source of many of the fairy stories now read to our children. Read the Arabian Nights. Solomon subdued the rebellious genii by pronouncing the name of Allah. The Arabian

Knight performed prodigies of valour by means of a Sword on which was inscribed the name of Allah.

From this it may be seen that the human race, during the period we are talking of, believed that knowledge of the true name of a man or god carried with it great power for good or evil. Therefore, great care was used to preserve the knowledge of the true name from those not entitled to it. It was therefore a common heritage of all peoples and nations of the world at the time of the rise of the Jews as a nation.

At this time Egypt was the richest and most powerful nation and occupied the valley of the Nile, with some holdings in Syria. The valley of the Euphrates also was the seat of several powerful kingdoms.

Ur, the city from which Abraham came, lay in the valley of the Euphrates, and, at that time, the river ran close to it. It was a city of culture and of great wealth. Recent excavations have brought to light much of interest. There was a magnificent temple to its god, Nannar, the moon god. It had a currency, a banking system, schools, and a written language. Its houses were well constructed of sun-dried brick. And, for that era, the kingdom covered a large territory. Besides the pantheon of gods worshipped in the main temple, each household had its own family god, like the Roman Penates.

Among the people living in this city, were certain families of Semitic origin. It was from one of these that Abraham came.

Abraham or "Abram" as he was then known grew to manhood in this city, and its culture had a great influence on his later life, and also on the Jewish people.

The Bible tells us Abraham received a call to leave Ur and with his father and his family departed to take up the life of a nomad or wandering shepherd and in time to become the founder of a mighty nation. Abraham was a monotheist and the household

god of his family was the symbol first used by Abraham to represent the Great Jehovah.

The story of the growth of the Jews as a nation need not here be told, but it might be well to mention several things that influenced the development of the nation and the people.

First, the Jews lived on the caravan routes between Egypt and the East and constantly met the people travelling back and forth. Secondly, the Jews at several times lived in Egypt. Under Joseph, they held positions of importance and frequently married Egyptians.

Third, the territory in which the Jews lived was for many years a tributary province of Egypt and later of Babylon.

Fourth, the Jews married at times with idolatrous peoples and their kings as well as the people were led from the worship of the true God.

All of these things not only influenced the nation as such, but had its effect upon their religion. It must be remembered that the early history of the Jews was not written, it was only oral tradition. It seems now to be reasonably certain that the first books of the Bible were not reduced to writing until the time of the Babylonish captivity. It is but natural that oral tradition during this long period of time would have been influenced by the great changes in the life and standards of the people.

That the custom of keeping sacred and holy the name of their God should have been adopted by the Jews is but natural. It could not be otherwise.

The Bible contains passage after passage having reference to the “Name” and the reverence due to it.

Now as to the loss of the “Word.”

This is furnished by Masonic tradition. There are two traditions. One was that Enoch under command of the Most High God built a vault of nine arches, in the lowest of which the “Name” was placed on a triangular plate of gold, that at the time of the flood this was lost and was not found until David began digging the foundations of the new Temple. The other is the more familiar one, which you all know.

These stories do not coincide, nor do they agree with the Biblical narrative. The Bible tells us that the “Name” was given to Moses, while in the wilderness, when the Lord spoke to Moses from the midst of the burning bush:

“Thus, shalt thou say unto the children of Israel: Jehovah, the God of your Fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob hath sent me unto you. This is my Name forever, and this is my memorial unto all generations.”

And,

“I am Jehovah, and I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac and unto Jacob by the name of El Shaddai, but by my Name Jehovah was I not known unto them.”

It is not necessary for Masonic purposes or for the purpose of this paper that tradition and the Bible are reconciled. But you will now say “how is it that the Word was lost?” We have it twice set forth in the Bible. Masonic tradition gives you a particularly good reason why the Word was lost. I will go back into history and try and give to you another.



The ancient manuscripts of the Bible were written in several languages, among them the Hebrew. Originally the Hebrew language was written without vowels, or anything to represent vowel sounds, until much later than the period we are now discussing. At that later time so-called points were used to indicate vowel sounds. The letters used were only consonants, such as we now see used in our rituals. Hence unless one knew the correct vowels to use, the “Name” could not be read or pronounced correctly, and it was lost. This is what happened. When it happened is another question.