

Stories Behind The Names In Royal Arch Freemasonry

A lecture delivered by EComp Russell Conn, 2nd Principal, to the East Lancashire Provincial Grand Officers Chapter (3747) on May 9th 2019

May I at the outset thank my colleagues the First and Third Principals and the Committee for kindly allowing me to deliver this address.

I felt that it would be instructive to give more of a back story to the colourful individuals and deity that makes our ceremonies so meaningful and colourful.

I was struck that in the course of our ceremonies we refer to historical and even modern day names without allowing ourselves time to pause, and take in their significance or even their meaning. I am indebted to EComp Ashley Hayman for his help and advice in preparing this talk.

We must start at the very beginning so to speak with name we use for the **TLGMH**, this name is so powerful and we are told in the 10 commandments itself that we *“must not take the name of the Lord your God in vain for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes my name in vain.”*

This obviously explains why the actual name is only pronounced once a year and by the High Priest when he entered the holies of holies to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

I am not allowed to pronounce it as it is written we will have to content ourselves with name Adonai when engaged in prayer and in English “The Name” reflecting the awe due by man to his creator.

The Hebrew letters reflect *“He was, He is, He will be”* the name Jehovah the three syllable word engraved on the plate of gold is a modern day use.

Those of us who were in the RA prior to 1989 will remember we used a different name – Jabulon.

There has been much debate over the origin and meaning of this word. There is no consensus even among Masonic researchers as to its meaning or legitimacy. One Masonic scholar alleges that the word first appeared in an early 18th-century Royal Arch ritual as the name of an allegorical explorer searching for the ruins of King Solomon's Temple. Another believes it is a descriptive name for God in Hebrew. The most common masonic explanation is that it is a word derived from combining parts of the name of “The Supreme Being” in different historic languages.

According to Masonic historian Arturo de Hoyos, the word Jahbulon was first used in the 18th century in early French versions of the Royal Arch degree. It relates a Masonic allegory in which Jabulon was the name of an explorer living during the time of Solomon who discovered the ruins of an ancient temple. Within the ruins he found a gold plate upon which the name of TLGMH (YKVK) was engraved.

This word was considered inappropriate and it was the late EComp Michael Fidler who lobbied Supreme Grand Chapter and had the name changed to its modern day Jehovah.

The “Name” as we will call it for the purpose of this talk was not the first representation, in Genesis it's Elohim and then El Shaddai .

Elohim when he exercises strict Judgement as in the Flood, is referred to by this name. When He exercises His mastery over nature and performs hidden miracles - as he did for the Patriarchs - He is called Shaddai.

However, the name יהוה (literally Lord) is more than a descriptive Name; it is a proper noun, for it is the actual Name the TLGMH and is known as Shem Ha Meforash ,or the “ineffable Name.” In respect of its great sanctity, it is not pronounced.

This is the way He introduces himself to Moses when he appeared to him in the burning bush on Mt Horeb when Moses asks how shall I tell the Children of Israel who sent me, the reply thunders out “I am” sent me .

He instructed Moses to tell the Children of Israel that the “God” who was about to redeem them was no different-from the “God” of their forefathers.

Our next character has to be **Adam** or Adam ha Rishon the first man.

He of course makes his appearance in the explanation of the signs when we are told “that the penal sign alludes to fall of Adam and dreadful penalty thereby no less than death itself, it intimates that the stiff necked and disobedient should be cut off from the land of the living by the sword of human justice.”

Could it be that the sword of human justice was the same sword held by the cherub who guarded the entrance to the Garden of Eden after the fall of Adam and Eve to prevent them returning-to their natural habitat.

The phrase Stiff necked and disobedient people are used over and over to describe the Children of Israel indeed whenever they strayed from their path this is how they were described.

The Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are part of the dialogue between the PS and Z,

Abraham the first of the Patriarchs is the emblem of hospitality which is certainly close to a mason’s heart. In fact if you are ever invited to a sukkah (booth) during the Feast of Tabernacles you as an honoured guest will be following in the footsteps of those angels who were entertained by our illustrious forefather Abraham in the Book of Genesis.

Isaac barely gets a mention but his son **Jacob** after his battle with the angel when he is touched on his sciatic nerve his name is changed to Israel, this is all depicted most graphically in the first degree tracing board and his dream which provides the legend of the ladder which stretched from heaven and earth.

Without Jacob there would be no twelve tribes and no banners to provide the colour for our ceremonies. If you go to Timna in Southern Israel close to the Hills of Moab you will find the tribes laid out as they would have done when they travelled from site to site during their forty years wandering in the desert of Sinai.

Our Grand Master **Moses** considered the prophets of all prophets who communicated directly with the Almighty From the moment he bursts on the scene at the foot Mt Horeb when the TLGMH reveals his intentions to bring the Children of Israel out of their Egyptian bondage out of slavery and the ultimate Exodus, Moses who merited seeing the back of the deity, copied down the Laws, who led the Children of Israel out of Egypt through the wilderness of Sinai for forty years to the very borders of Canaan..

Moses was of course succeeded by his disciple Joshua who led the successful conquest of Canaan who appears in the second degree as part of the hailing sign “when Joshua fought the battles of the Lord when he prayed fervently for the continuation of the light of day so he could complete the overthrow of his enemies “

This means of victory was first perfected by his mentor Moses who as a much older man needed his arms supported, for legend has it that when his arms fell the Israelites were nearly defeated and when they were raised they were victorious. Since Moses was by now a man of very mature years they put rocks under them to keep them aloft.

Moses of course makes a very important entrance in the signs when he is portrayed as “shielding his eyes from the brightness of Divine Presence, and placed his hand on his heart as a token of obedience.”

The Book of Judges provide a very rich tapestry of stories and none more so than that of **Jephthah** that mighty Gileaditish general who makes his appearance in the Second Degree Tracing Board, Jephthah having been forced into exile by his ungrateful people, when the fear of the Ephraimites threatens to overwhelm the nation they plead with him to return,(rather in the same way another war time leader was exhorted to assume the reins of power and save a nation from possible destruction)

Jephthah pleads for victory and rashly makes a pledge that if he is successful the first thing that emerges from the house he will sacrifice to the Almighty. Sadly for him that happens to be his daughter, legend has it that he decreed that his daughter has to remain housebound for the rest of her life.

We move swiftly on to our next character **Boaz** described as the great Grandfather of David a Prince and ruler in Israel. His princely credentials are disputed but he certainly was the creator of the Davidic line. The Book of Ruth describes in detail how Ruth daughter in law of Naomi seeks out her kinsman Boaz when they move from Moab back to Canaan and she follows Naomi’s advice to the letter and entices Boaz to marry her and without this union who knows how history and particularly masonic history might have been different. Boaz was a benevolent landowner and he internalised the commandment as set out in the Book of Leviticus “When you reap the harvest of your land you are not to remove completely the corners of your field as you reap, and also do not gather the gleanings of your harvest; for the poor and the stranger are you to leave them.” The Bible clearly reminds us that anyone who helps the poor and needy especially the widow and orphan and shares his crop with them it is as if he had built the Temple.

So it is no surprise that Boaz was merited with having a column named after him and it should be his great great grandson who built this magnificent edifice to the honour of the TLGMH.

King David Boaz’s great grandson doesn’t get the representation he probably deserves except in the ceremony of installation, but his son who was granted the honour of building the First Temple is integral to the whole of craft masonry.

Jachin the name of the right hand pillar named masonically after the assistant High Priest who officiated at its dedication is a minor character in the Bible and try as I might, I am not able to add more than the word means” to establish and when conjoined with the former stability”.

Solomon that wisest of all men requests help from his close neighbour and monarch Hiram King of Tyre to provide material and men to build this finest of structures, and they employ that mighty architect, Hiram Abith (1 Kings 7:13,14), described as the son of a widowed woman, from the tribe of Naftali; his father had been a Tyrian coppersmith.

He was full of wisdom, insight and knowledge to do all sorts of work in copper. (2 Chron 2:12) Hiram King of Tyre writes to Solomon: *Now I have sent an artisan who understands wisdom, who knows how to work with gold, silver, copper And how to cut all kinds of engravings and make all kinds of designs that might be presented to him.*

Where would our ceremonies particularly the Third be, if it were not for this most excellent of craftsmen?

The Royal Arch ceremonies introduce us to a whole new set of dramatic personae.

I have already mentioned Adam, the Patriarchs, and have mentioned our Grandmaster Moses.

Before we introduce Zerubbabel, Nehemiah, Ezra and Joshua we need to mention a very important character King Josiah who when he thought his kingdom was being threatened by the Babylonian horde he took the three holiest artefacts from the Temple he hid the Ark of the Covenant which despite the best efforts of Steven Spielberg and Indiana Jones has never been found, the anointing oil, and the Uram and Thuram the holy parchment that fitted in the pouch located at the back of the High Priests breastplate. And when the Second Temple was constructed these holy artefacts had to be substituted rather like the substituted secrets in the Third Degree.

We come to the narrative which is so integral to the RA ceremony the rebuilding of the Temple. It would be wrong not to finish this journey through the history of the names without touching on this most important historical fact.

About seventy years after the Hebrews went into Exile, **Cyrus** the Persian King conquered Babylon and he extended an empire, which, for the next two centuries, covered all the countries of western Asia. Only a few months after King Cyrus reached Babylon, he issued an edict permitting the Jewish Exiles to return to Judea and invited the two faithful tribes to rebuild the city and the Temple of Jerusalem. His motives in doing so are not entirely known, but what matters is that he gave the two Tribes his protection, supplied them with treasure and materials for carrying out their work, and he promised to restore the riches carried off from the Temple at Jerusalem some seventy years before. This Proclamation of Cyrus ends the Second Book of Chronicles,

What is not always known is that according to the Persian law no King of the Medes and Persians as they were known was allowed to rescind an edict.

In fact the King Ahasuerus or Xerxes who is the King in the Book of Esther having made an edict he was not allowed to rescind it but instead had to grant his Queen Esther the right in his name to write another edict.

The invitation to return was not at first warmly or widely accepted; for most of the Jews, having been born in Exile, had never seen Judea and so it was only a small group that at first availed itself of the King's permission to make the long journey to Judea. A band of pioneers, under

Sheshbazzar, returned to Jerusalem in 537 BCE and started the work. Seventeen years later, a much stronger contingent under **Zerubbabel** arrived. The returned Exiles were mortified to find that they could occupy only the ruins and immediate vicinity of Jerusalem; for some tribes of mixed blood had moved into Judea during the years of Exile and they were to stir up a lot of distress for the returned Exiles in the years which followed.

Twenty-one years later, in 516 BCE — under **Zerubbabel** the Governor, **Joshua** the High Priest, and the Prophets **Haggai and Zechariah** —the Second Temple was completed and dedicated to the worship of God. Priests among the returned Exiles regulated the ritual of the new Temple, in accordance with the Book of the Law, which had been discovered by **Hilkiah** the High Priest just over a century earlier. In Persia Cyrus had been succeeded by Cambyses in 529 BCE. He was influenced by the hostility of the tribes dwelling near Jerusalem, and as a result he stopped the work.

He, in turn, was succeeded by **Darius I** in 521, and it was he who gave the returned Exiles badly needed assistance. To his credit Darius reading of his grandfather's edict was determined that the Temple should be rebuilt and his grandfather's wishes be fulfilled.

King Darius permitted the stolen treasure to be returned to Jerusalem, under an armed escort; and it is this difficult and dangerous journey, which is thought by some writers — but only some — to be symbolised by the early Royal Arch ceremony known as Passing the Veils.

Haggai the Prophet deserves a great place in the narrative of the returned Exiles. He had been born in Babylon and he is believed to have travelled to Judea with Zerubbabel. To him fell the immediate task of exhorting the Jews to finish rebuilding the Temple, work in which there had been a break of 16 years, from 536 to 520, due to the hostile action of the neighbouring tribes. The history of the period is to be found in the Book of Ezra, part of which some scholars believe to have been written by Haggai himself. In 458 BCE, fifty-eight years after the completion of the Temple, Ezra the Scribe arrived in Jerusalem.

This is in itself important as we always assume that Ezra, Zerubbabel, Haggai, and Joshua all were concurrent which of course is not the case.

Thirteen years later, in the year 445, Artaxerxes of Persia allowed **Nehemiah**, his aristocratic Jewish courtier and cupbearer, to return to Jerusalem with the status of Governor. Under Nehemiah, the Children of Israel rebuilt the broken walls of the city in the face of fierce hostility from the neighbouring tribes who suffered under a grievance. They had professed themselves willing to assist the returned Exiles to rebuild the Temple, but had been spurned by the two faithful tribes of Benjamin and Judah; who regarded them in spite of their largely Jewish blood as foreigners. They rebuilt the city walls in only fifty-two days in spite of fierce opposition. Their valour is recorded in the Book of Nehemiah.

The RA and Craft ceremonies are populated with many of the most stirring names from Biblical history, scripture gives an insight into many of their lives and experiences and the early creators of the ritual no doubt eminent Biblical scholars will probably have been able to read Hebrew and certainly will have understood the power of the stories. Can we possibly imagine our ceremonies without many of the characters we have looked at tonight, we owe a great debt of gratitude to their endeavours and their legacy

This has enabled us over three hundred years since the formation of masonry to enjoy wonderfully descriptive ceremonies which brings centuries of history to life often in the most dramatic form.