

That Which Was Lost

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***In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God.***

St. John 1:1

In the Bible there are one-hundred verses about the Word of God. Literally, the Bible is more than a book detailing men's thought about what God is like. It is God's communication to men. His words are transmitted to us through its pages.

Freemasonry informs us that there once existed a Word of surpassing value and claiming a profound veneration; that this Word was known to but few; that it was at length lost; and that a temporary substitute for it was adopted. The philosophy of Freemasonry teaches us that there can be no resurrection without a death – no restoration without a subsequent decay; on the same principle it follows that the loss of the Word must suppose its eventual recovery.¹

After completing the Master Mason Degree, we are told that we have reached highest degree in Freemasonry. But, during the drama of the Second Section, we are informed the genuine secrets of the Master Mason have been lost. What we have is a substitute word – but the “Master's Word is lost”.

The ancient manuscripts of the Constitutions of Masonry, embodying the legends and the regulations of the craft, constitute one link between present day speculative and medieval operative masonry, there is another link, namely, the Mason Word and the practices associated with its communication. Two significant differences, however, between the old Constitutions and the Mason Word must be noted.

First, whereas versions of the former were in existence as early as the late fourteenth century, the latter has not been traced before the sixteenth century.

Second, whereas the former would almost certainly appear to be of English origin (the few surviving Scottish versions being direct or indirect copies of English originals), the Mason Word, as an operative institution, is almost certainly of Scottish origin.

¹ Dr. Albert G. Mackey, *The Symbolism of Freemasonry*, Chapter XXXI, 1882

No traces of the Mason Word, or of any other secret means of recognition, have been found among English operative masons in the Middle Ages; nor, so far as we know, is there any evidence even to suggest it. Moreover, it was provided by the eighth Article of the Regius and Cooke Manuscripts that a less skilled journeyman was to be replaced by a better skilled man as soon as practicable, which strongly suggests that, according to the masons' customs, skill, and not a password, was the recognized test leading to employment. The Mason Word, as an operative institution, would appear to have been a Scottish practice and consequently almost entirely with Scottish conditions.²

The Edinburgh Register House Manuscript, written in 1696, suggests the essence of the matter lay in the words, signs, a grip, and postures, which, together with "the five points of the fellowship", were communicated to members, either upon their admission as entered apprentices, or subsequently when they became fellow crafts. The "five points" are not explained, but simply listed as follows: foot to foot, knee to knee, heart to heart, hand to hand, and ear to ear.³

A slightly separate set of "five points" is given in the Graham Manuscript, written in 1726. Noah's three sons, desirous of finding a valuable secret which their father had possessed, but Noah went to his grave before the sons received the secret. They found nothing in the grave except the dead body; when the finger was gripped it came away, and so with the wrist and elbow. The sons then reared up the dead body, supporting it by setting foot to foot, knee to knee, breast to breast, cheek to cheek and hand to back. Thereupon "one said here is yet marrow in this bone and the second said but a dry bone."⁴

Samuel Prichard's advertisement in 1730 referred to the death of the Widow's Son and the Hiram Legend⁵ strongly suggests that a version of the story was known in 1726, but Speculative Masonry was acquainted with the Hiram Legend earlier from a Hiram footnote in James Anderson's Constitutions of 1723⁶:

The installation of Dr. Beal as Deputy Grand Master 1721 included a story of the search for a secret, three masons murdered Hiram, King Solomon's Master of the Works at the building of the Temple, to extort from him the secrets of a Master Mason. On his being missed, twelve fellow crafts were ordered to search for him, and they agreed that if they did not find the word in or about him the first word should be the

² Douglas Knoop, *The Genesis of Freemasonry*, University of Sheffield, Chapter V, October 1946

³ Ibid

⁴ Ibid

⁵ *Masonry Dissected*, Samuel Prichard, London, 1730

⁶ Douglas Knoop, *The Genesis of Freemasonry*, University of Sheffield, Chapter V, October 1946

master's word. Ultimately his body was found under a covering of green moss, and King Solomon ordered that it should be taken up and decently buried. When they took him by the forefinger the skin came off, whereupon they took a firmer grip of his hand and raised him by the five points of fellowship.

There is some similarity between the Graham Manuscript's story of Noah and that of Hiram in Anderson's Constitutions of 1738 – both have the same motif of attempting to obtain a secret from a dead body and both have the same result: to provide a substituted secret word until the genuine word can be found. The “Lost Word” is the very basic science of Masonic Symbolism. No matter what the Word was, no matter how it was lost, nor why a substitute was provided, nor when or where it will be recovered – these are all points of secondary importance for an understanding the symbolism.

The Word, with its accompanying myth of a loss, a substitute, and a recovery, becomes a symbol of the personal progress of a candidate from his first initiation to the completion of his course, when he receives a full development of the mysteries. Therefore, the true meaning of the Lost Word is Divine Truth, symbolically speaking.⁷

In Masonic ritual Hiram Abif was asked for the Master's Word and he responded when the temple was complete and the three Grand Masters present and not before. In the Second Section of the Master Mason Degree, Grand Master Abif was murdered by three ruffians and the body was buried in the rubbish of the temple. In the Royal Master Degree, Grand Master Abif was murdered and the word was buried in the Temple's Ninth Arch.

Where does the ritual says Grand Masters King Solomon and Hiram King of Tyre ever had the Masters' Word? What we have is a substitute word – but the “Master's Word is lost”.

Let me leave you with this – the highest and most sacred facet of Masonic Obligations are their spiritual aspect - treading the path of Light, the path of DIVINE TRUTH. In the First Degree, we seek acquisition of *Moral* Truth; in the Second Degree, we seek acquisition of *Intellectual* Truth; in the Third Degree, we *Reflect* on the most interesting of all human studies - the knowledge of yourself; and as a Master Mason we come face-to-face with *Introspection* Truth and acquisition of *Divine* Knowledge in the Holy Royal Arch Degree.

⁷ Dr. Albert G. Mackey, *Encyclopedia of Freemasonry*, 1884

In the words of the Grand Prelate of Alberta, the Rev. J. H. Miller⁸:

A down the winding stream of time,
In sweetest song and old-time rhyme,
There comes the story of a WORD,
Most powerful word man ever heard,
The NAME of HIM who only spoke
And worlds on worlds to life awoke.

This word so runs the ancient tale
Spoken behind the Temple's Veil
By High Priest's lips but once each year,
By chance was lost to tongue and ear.

From day of loss through ceaseless time
Strict search was made in every clime,
In valley low, on mountains high,
Where rivers run, where wheat-fields lie,
Through forest deep, o'er trackless main,
That man might speak that WORD again.

The ages came; the ages went.
And men, on fruitless search intent,
Forgot the voice that sang the song,
Forgot the hand that led them 'long,
Forgot the dawn that broke the day.

Long years had come, long years had gone,
When came a bright and golden dawn,
When voice with sweetest note was heard,
"The Royal Arch has found the WORD!"

To Royal Arch Masonry has been given, the WORD.

To the Knight Templar is given the INTERPRETATION

Shall we say more?



⁸ Rev. J. H. Miller, *Freemasonry's Lost Word*, Grand Chapter of Royal Arch Masons of Alberta, 2009