What Was Lost and Found?

Q. What is it that which was lost and found?

A. We should not take the wording of our ritual too literally; remember we have been told that Freemasonry is a peculiar system of morality, veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols. Remember, too, that our rituals are based more on legend than on fact. Neither Grand Lodge nor Grand Chapter has ever given an answer to what it is that was lost and found; it is left for each of us to find a satisfactory answer for himself. Before the recent ritual changes the answer to this question was often given in one of three ways. Some argued it was the word that used to appear on the triangle that was lost and found; there is plenty of evidence to show that this was not the case. Others argued it was the Name of God; there are many theologians and biblical scholars who say that not even in the darkest days of the dispersion of the Israelites was the Name of God lost; they may have ceased to worship Him, but the prophets and the reforming kings of Israel ensured His Name was not forgotten. Then there were those who said it was the method of sharing the Name; but the sharing procedure didn't start until years after the beginnings of the Royal Arch. None of these ideas appealed to me; so what are my views? We should not interpret the words 'lost' and 'found' in the physical sense, losing something by physically misplacing it and regaining it by the use of one's eyes; the words were probably meant to be interpreted in a metaphysical sense, based on abstract, general reasoning. I would define the word 'lost' in the sense we use it as 'failing to keep something in mind', and similarly define the word 'found' as 'discovering something for the first time.' Some say that what was lost by King Solomon and most of the kings that came after him for the next 400 years or so, was the belief that Jehovah was the ONLY God of Israel. Other religions had their gods, but Israel had only ONE God; Jehovah, God of Israel. This was a religious secret known only to the Children of Israel. God had chosen them from among the nations of the earth and had entered into a Covenant with them, and with them only. The loss was due to the fact that Solomon and most of his successors disobeyed God's commandments and worshipped gods of other nations. They failed to keep in mind their Covenant with God, the ONLY God of Israel. What was found by the time the captives returned to Jerusalem was of a more universal nature than that which was lost. The exiles had re-discovered the truth that Jehovah was the ONLY God of Israel; but they also discovered the religious doctrine that Jehovah was the God of ALL nations. This doctrine or religious truth is not something dreamt up by the compilers of our ritual; theologians tell us it is expounded in the Bible. Further explanation may be helpful with regard to the words 'found' or 'discovered'. When something is discovered, such as Newton's discovery of the law of gravity, or the discovery of America by Christopher Columbus, it does not mean that what was discovered had been lost, or that the discovery sprung into being the first time it was made; in the examples given the law of gravity was a principle by which the world had
been governed from its creation, and the continent of America was a land mass long before it was discovered by Columbus.

So it is with religious truths; the exiles returning from Babylon discovered (or found) the religious truth that Jehovah was not one god among many gods, but the one and only God for all mankind. The truth of monotheism, like the law of gravity, had been in existence from the creation of the world, but only on their return was this realized by the exiles; they became aware of this knowledge for the first time.

It was the discovery of this truth that became woven into the fabric of our Royal Arch legend.

Our ritual compilers drew on various points; the teachings inherent in the relevant passages of the Volume of the Sacred Law; the finding of the Book of the Law by Hilkiah; the reforming work of Ezra and Nehemiah; the return from captivity to Jerusalem, and a legend dating from at least the fourth century AD dealing with a discovery in a vault.

Traces of all these can be found in the legend we use in the Royal Arch in England today; a legend that is meant to point the way to a belief in TTALGMH as seen by each individual Companion; a legend which contains a 'secret' that paradoxically is NOT a secret, namely that Jehovah is not just the Name of the God of Israel, but the God of ALL the nations.

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