

What were those words in your installation into the Knights Templar?

I have previously talked to you about some of the details of our Preceptories, in particular some of the officers within them.

However...there are many details which we have seen in a candidate's initiation ceremony which they, and possibly we, do not really understand. So, for their benefit, here are some explanations of the words they heard and that they, and we, may be confused or curious about.

So to get us started....

Golgotha

'Golgotha' is a Hebrew term that is mentioned by three Gospel writers. They tell us that its meaning is 'the place of the skull' and there are at least two possible reasons why such a name would be of significance to those who are Knights Templar.

Most importantly, our use of the word relates to the part of a knight's installation ceremony when, having been spared some of the seven years of warfare, the candidate assists the Marshal to unveil the cross with their swords.

The original cross was said to have been erected outside the city walls of Jerusalem and the place of its planting was called 'that of the skull'. It seems to have acquired this name by being a common place of execution where people could gain access through several gates of the city.

Curious spectators have long gathered at public executions whether the Romans arranged them in the first century or by London authorities did in the eighteenth. Almost certainly, the bones of previously condemned persons would mark this place of execution. And amongst these bones would have been a skull or two. This scene of death was well named.

The name behind the execution ground may have had another origin. It was, as far as students of old Jerusalem can determine, located on an outcrop of rock. The word for such a small hill in Hebrew or other Semitic languages is 'ras', which translates as 'a head', just as we have Beachy Head near Eastbourne.

The bare nature of this 'head' may well have suggested some similarity to a skull, hence the name. What we are doing by using this password is identifying ourselves with Christ the Master of old who passed by this dreadful place and so offering ourselves as his knights in his warfare, even unto death.

This is why the letters IHS and INRI are inscribed above the cross. They referred to Jesus Our Saviour or Jesus Nazarenus Rex Iudaeorum, Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.

It is fitting that the Marshal's instruction, during our seven years of warfare, is that we shall defend our head (skull) from attacks by those who oppose us on our symbolic journey around the Preceptory.

It ought not to escape our attention that the image of a skull is to be imprinted on our minds at least three more times after the word 'Golgotha' has been communicated to us. The first occasion is when we are directed to contemplate the emblems of life and death displayed at the foot of the cross that we have helped to unveil.

It is well to recall that as these emblems are no longer displayed in the third degree in most Craft Lodges, they are all the more significant here.

We are next called upon to undergo the 'year of penance and mortification', which we perform by a steady walk around the Preceptory. The items that we then hold before our eyes are to remind us not only of our human frailty (which, like a flame, can be extinguished), but also of Him who gave up his life so that we might pursue ours to the full.

Our last reminder is when we are told of the treachery of Simon of Syracuse who was decapitated as part of his just punishment. It is through these acts that the importance of Golgotha is imprinted on our minds and hearts.

One last fascinating thought: St Basil of Caesarea, one of the so called Church Fathers, declared in 379AD that he believed the reason why the hill of Calvary was called Golgotha was that it was the spot where the skull of Adam was buried.

Since Jesus of Nazareth was described as the 'second Adam' in St Paul's letters, one can perhaps understand why St Basil would have wanted to associate the hill of Christ's redemptive death with the one whom he regarded as the source of all human sin.

It is also true that our earliest ancestors as Accepted Freemasons were eager to claim Adam as a 'craftsman' like themselves. Whatever their reasons may have been, we as Knights Templar do not need to go back that far. The events on Golgotha of just 2000 years ago will suffice.

The word may simply be a password, but for the true knight it will be a lasting watchword, the guide to our mortal existence and our 'ineffable and eternal happiness in the world to come'.

Maher Shalal Hash Baz

Well...compared to this name, reciting Golgotha is child's play!

A tongue twister isn't it? How many times I wonder does a Preceptor ask himself 'Just what is it that I am doing when I utter these four strange Hebrew words for the benefit of an already bewildered candidate?'

Even the knights who attended ceremonies as onlookers may still find themselves puzzled at this point and confused by what would appear to be a remarkably difficult password. What is more, it seems to have little point, even when its English translation is explained.

In an attempt to reveal its true meaning, three things need to be understood. First of all, it was a symbolic name given to the son of the Hebrew prophet Isaiah (found in chapter eight of the prophet's book in the Bible).

There he explains that, as with John the Baptist and Jesus, God revealed to their fathers what name they were to give their sons. The literal translation of the name that Isaiah was commanded to give his son was 'Quick spoil, fast plunder'.

Isaiah was assured that in the name, the future of the Hebrew nation to which his father and son belonged was being foretold. It was a name that gave a clear warning of a terrible truth.

If we speculate as to why an Old Testament prophecy matters as much to us as it did the Christian Knights, the answer is that it is part of Jesus's past.

The second point to be aware of is that in the preceding chapter of the book of Isaiah, we are presented with the context in which this name is to be set. In chapter 7, verses 16 and 17, it reads '...but before the boy knows enough to reject the wrong and choose what is right...the Lord will bring upon you and upon your people and on your father's house such days as have not come since that day when Ephraim broke away from Judah: he will bring the King of Assyria.'

The prophecy is being made clear. Judah and Israel – the two kingdoms that were created after the death of King Solomon – were at war with each other and each weakened their resistance to an outside enemy.

Such an enemy was the kingdom of Assyria, who although far away across the Euphrates and the Tigris, would overpower them both. In requiring Isaiah to adopt the name 'Maher Halal Hash Baz' for his son, God was telling Isaiah's race, 'You have been warned'.

And finally, do keep in mind that all of this did actually take place. Turning Isaiah chapter 10, the following can be found: 'Woe to the Assyrians, the rod of my anger...I despatch him against who anger me, to seize loot and snatch plunder and to trample them down like mud in the streets.' It was such a terrible retribution for a people that disobeyed their God.

It is against this backdrop that we turn to our ritual once more. After noting the verse in which Isaiah is told to 'take a large tablet and write upon it in common characters' a word not initially revealed to be a boy's name, the candidate is entrusted with the Grand Password.

At the same time, he is given what is said to be its translation: 'in making speed to the spoil he hasteneth the prey'. How many I wonder are in the Order without an understanding of what that could possibly mean? On the face of it, it seems to suggest that to capture a city for example, the prey must be allowed to escape.

This is, of course, quite incorrect. What has happened is that someone has taken the literal translation and misapplied it, for what it really means is: He (the invader) will hasten to spoil us and speedily make us his prey'.

For a Knight Templar today, the warning concerns the evil that can so easily overtake us if we do not obey the commands of God and seek to do his will.

We do not need to concern ourselves with changing our ritual or giving a clearer explanation because the name 'Maher Halal Hash Baz' is just a password. What we do need to do is recognise the important message that it was seeking to provide when it was first mentioned to Isaiah and then applied to our situation.

Our real name is 'Christian' meaning 'a follower of Christ'.

Don't let us fall prey to the powers of evil that still seek to conquer us.

Now....there are many symbols from your installation that may need explanation, such as The Pilgrim's Hat, the small white stone you received, the Lamb, Cock and Dove on the Sepulchre....but these can wait for another time!