



**The Grand Lodge of Ancient, Free and  
Accepted Masons of Virginia**  
**Committee on Masonic Education**



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**DEO Presentation Program Paper**

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**THE IMPORTANCE OF THE HIRAM ABIF LEGEND**

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No one in our Lodges is unfamiliar with Hiram Abif, although some of the Brethren may be surprised to learn that the Hiram Abif Legend was not always a part of Masonic lore. Prior to 1730, our Masonic Brethren were taught that the "secret word" that they sought was buried with the Old Testament Biblical character, Noah. The first known recital of the Hiram Legend with respect to Masonic ritual was printed in 1730 in Samuel Pritchard's critique of Masonry "Masonry Dissected." Thus, while no one really knows how Hiram Abif, the widow's son, became the principal character in Masonic ritual, recognized in most countries, compared to much of our Masonic ritual and tradition, Hiram is a relative newcomer.

We are told that Hiram arrives in Jerusalem and is appointed by King Solomon as Chief Architect and Master of Works at the construction of his Temple. But there is more that we may not know, and when searching for answers to the question, "Who was "Hiram?" we find several clues in the Bible.

First there is 2 Chronicles 2:13 it says, “I – [referring to the King of Tyre] – am sending you Hiram (or Hiram) Abif, a man of great skill. And in 2 Chronicles 4:16 it says, “The pots, shovels, meat forks and all related articles. All the objects that Hiram Abif made for King Solomon for the Temple of the Lord were of polished bronze.” Another clue is found at 1 Kings 7:14 which states, “He was a widow’s son of the tribe of Naphtali, whose father was a man of Tyre and a skilled craftsman in bronze. Hiram [or Hiram] was filled with wisdom, and understanding, and cunning to do all kinds of work in bronze. He came to King Solomon and did all the work assigned to him.”

And in 1 Kings 13, we learn that King Solomon conscripted laborers from all Israel—thirty thousand men. He sent them off to Lebanon in shifts of ten thousand a month, so they spent one month in Lebanon and two months at home. Adoniram was in charge of the forced labor.

Solomon had seventy thousand carriers and eighty thousand stonecutters in the hills, as well as thirty-three hundred foremen who supervised the project and directed the workers. At the king’s command, they removed from the quarry large blocks of high-grade stone to provide a foundation of dressed stone for the temple. The craftsmen of Solomon and Hiram and workers from Byblos cut and prepared the timber and stone for the building of the temple.

Flavius Josephus in his *Antiquities of the Jews* refers to Hiram as an artificer or craftsman. "Now Solomon sent for an artificer out of Tyre, whose name was Hiram: he was by birth of the tribe of Naphtali, on his mother's side – for she was of that tribe; but his father was Ur, of the stock

of the Israelites.” We also know that Martin Luther Introduced the character of Hiram Abif to the popular imagination when he translated the Bible into German.

So much for some of the Biblical and historical references. The story known to Masons takes a somewhat different trajectory. Hiram is a Master of the Work, a superintending architect with more than 85,000 workmen employed in building the Temple, a project we are told that took some seven years to complete. Some of the workmen became dissatisfied and made demands before the Temple was completed, but Hiram refuses with results of which we all are aware.

We do not claim that the Hiramic legend as portrayed in the third degree is historically true, but I would note that Biblical records are entirely silent on certain aspects of this portrayal. The point, however, is not historical accuracy. Instead we find the key to the Masonic drama in the fact that Hiram Abif is true to his trust and refuses to agree to unjust demands. Thus, the Legend teaches integrity, devotion, and faith. Hiram Abif is rightly held up for Masons as a model of unshaken fidelity, and we are admonished to be as true to our Masonic obligations as he proved to be to his. These qualities are a foundational element in the development of our character as Masons just as the Legend of Hiram Abif is today a foundational element of Masonic ritual.