

WHO - AND WHAT - WAS HIRAM ABIF?  
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Although he is the central character of the Masonic tradition, the ritual actually has very little to say about him. It tells us he was Grand Master of Workmen at the building of King Solomon's Temple, that he was chief architect of the Temple, and that he was killed before the Temple was completed, and that he was buried in the Temple after his body was found.

The ritual tells us very little of his background, other than that he was the son of a widow of the Tribe of Naphtali.

The first mention of him in the ritual is when we are told that he cast the two pillars that stood on the porch of the Temple. The source of this is 2nd Chronicles, Chapter 3, Verse 15: "Also he made before the house two pillars of thirty and five cubits high, and the capital that was on the top of each of them was five cubits ... and called the name of that on the right hand Jachin, and the name of that on the left Boaz."

We must get the greater part of our information from the Great Light in Masonry. We must bear in mind at all times two factors:

- (1) that Masonic tradition deviates from the Biblical accounts, and
- (2) that even the Bible is not consistent.

First, let us investigate the tradition that he designed the Temple. We read in 1<sup>st</sup> Chronicles, Chapter 28, Verse 11, that "David gave to Solomon his son the pattern of the porch of the Temple, and of the houses thereof, and of the treasurers thereof, and of the upper rooms thereof, and of the inner chambers thereof, and of the place of the ark-cover, and the pattern of all that he had by the Spirit, for the courts of the house of the Lord, etc." including exact designs for all the vessels to be used in the Temple, with their weights in gold or silver already determined. The Bible does not say who designed all this, but from it we can see that Solomon had a complete set of plans and specifications before he let his construction contract.

The second tradition to examine is that he was Grand Master of the workmen. We read in 1st Kings, Chapter 5, that when Hiram of Tyre heard that Solomon had been anointed King of Israel, he sent his servants to convey his respects to the new monarch. Solomon then asked King Hiram to send him timber and paid for it with

"wheat and oil." Solomon then drafted 30,000 men from Israel and sent them to Lebanon, 10,000 a month in shifts, to help cut the timber. The man in charge of this draft was named Adoniram. Chapter 5 closes with telling us that these workmen also cut the stones for the foundation of the Temple. At this same time, according to 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles, Chapter 2, Solomon asked Hiram of Tyre to send him "a man skilful to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass, and in iron, and in purple, and crimson, and blue, and that has skill to grave all manner of gravings, to be with the skilful men that are with me in Judah and in Jerusalem." And this time he will pay for all the labour and materials already contracted for with "20,000 measures of beaten wheat, and 20,000 baths of wine, and 20,000 baths of oil." Since all grains were collectively known in biblical times as "corn" we see that the labourers were paid wages of "corn, wine and oil."

Hiram answered Solomon's request, stating that he had sent "a skilful man, endowed with understanding, even (as it says in the original Hebrew) 'Hiram my father,' the son of the daughters of Dan, and his father was a man of Tyre, skilful to work in gold, and in silver, in brass, in iron, in stone, and in timber, in purple, in blue, and in fine linen and in crimson; also to grave any manner of graving, and to devise any device; to do whatever may be set before him."

A parallel to this passage is in 1<sup>st</sup> Kings, Chapter 7. We read that "King Solomon sent and fetched Hiram out of Tyre. He was the son of a widow of the tribe of Naphtali, and his father was a man of Tyre, a worker in brass; and he was filled with wisdom and understanding and skill, to work all work in brass. And he came to King Solomon and wrought all his work."

Thus, we see that this workman was responsible for (1) erecting the Temple according to the designs which Solomon already had, (2) casting all the metal work that went into the Temple in any way, and (3) doing the decoration of the completed building. A very responsible position, without a doubt, similar in many ways to a modern-day construction superintendent. So Masonic tradition is correct in describing him as Grand Master of the workmen in the actual construction and completion of the Temple.

But who was he? As already stated, Hiram of Tyre described him as "Hiram my father." The editors of the King James version of the Bible assumed, and rightly so, that the father of a King would not be a manual labourer, no matter how skilful. Furthermore, if he were actually the king's father, he would be dead, because the kingship would pass from father to son at the death of the father. So, these editors called him "a man of Hiram my father's," assuming that both kings of

Tyre bore the name "Hiram." The Revised Standard version of 1952 evaded the issue completely by using the Hebrew phrase "Hiram my father" as it exists in Hebrew, and came up with the name "Harambee." I must explain for a moment that the written Hebrew language at that time contained no vowels, only consonants.

Thus, the name consists of the three letters "HRM", which we are free to pronounce "Hiram" or "Huram" as we choose. For a proper translation we must turn to Hebrew sources. In Hebrew, at all times, the word "father" was also used as a title to describe a man of some eminence. The man in question was the leading artisan in the service of King Hiram of Tyre, and the King's description of him, as stated in the Jewish Publication Society version, is "Hiram my master craftsman".

But who was he? Chronicles says his mother was of the tribe of Dan. Kings says she was of the tribe of Naphtali. Both agree that his father was a man of Tyre. From this we learn that he was the product of a mixed marriage, as the Tyrians were idolaters, and with a mother that was Jewish.

But what was Hiram's religion? For this we turn to Masonic tradition. We are told that it was his daily custom to retire into the unfinished Sanctum Sanctorum, or Holy of Holies, to offer up his devotions to God. This tells us that Hiram had to be Jewish, as no other people at that time worshipped the Lord. Which means that he had to be raised as a Jew by his Jewish mother. What basis is there for making this statement? Although Jewish law traces descent through the father, it establishes one's religion based on that of the mother, on the theory that exact fatherhood may be questioned, but motherhood is a certainty. Hiram Abif's mother raised him as a Jew because he was born one.

Now let us examine the Masonic tradition concerning his death and subsequent burial. The ritual indicates that he was killed before the Temple was completed and was eventually buried in the Temple. Masonic tradition developed in England, where great men were buried in Westminster Abbey, so it was only natural for the English to have Hiram buried in the Temple. However, this is contrary to Jewish law. It is just not allowed to bury anyone in a house of worship, no matter who he was. Second, we read in 1st Kings, Chapter 7, that "Hiram made an end of doing all the work that he wrought for King Solomon in the house of the Lord," and it goes on to list all the metal objects that the Temple contained. We even read in a newspaper of the period (Jerusalem Chronicles, Vol. 1, No. 19, dated 16 Tishri 2803) that after the Temple was dedicated, "Hiram the Royal Architect and master coppersmith was received by the King." In fact, this newspaper also has an

interview with Hiram, in which he details the location, materials, measurements and cost of the Temple.

But what actually was the end of Hiram Abif? We really do not know, as there is no more mention of him in the Bible after the completion of the Temple. As Masons, we must regard him as he is given to us, a man faithful to a trust even though his faithfulness cost him his life, to teach us that we have been entrusted with something valuable which we must guard with our lives, yet which is immortal and will survive us even after we have departed this earthly life.