

# *Hiram Abiff*



The Widow's Son of Tyre or Hiram Abi

Hiram Abiff (other spellings "Hiram" "Abif", and "Hiram-Abi"; also known as Hiram Abi "the Widow's Son") is a character who figures prominently in an allegorical way that is presented during the third-degree of Craft **Freemasonry**. Hiram is the chief architect of **King Solomon's Temple**, who is murdered by three ruffians, during an unsuccessful attempt to force him to divulge the Master Masons' secret password. It is explained in the lecture that follows this murder that the story is a lesson in fidelity to one's word, and in the brevity of life. Numerous scholars, both Masonic and non-Masonic, have speculated that the character may have been based upon one or more Hiram's story that appear in the **Bible**.

## *The Masonic Legend of Hiram Abiff*

The tale of Hiram Abiff as passed down in Masonic Lodges underpins the third degree. It starts with his arrival in Jerusalem, and his appointment by Solomon as chief architect and master of works at the construction of his temple. As the temple is nearing completion, three fellow craft masons from the workforce ambush him as he leaves the building, demanding the secrets of a master mason. Hiram is challenged by each in turn, and at each refusal to divulge the information his assailant strikes him with a mason's tool (differing between jurisdictions). He is injured by the first two assailants, and struck dead by the last. His murderers hide his body under a pile of rubble, returning at night to move the body outside the city, where they bury it in a shallow grave marked with a sprig of acacia. As the Master is missed the next day, Solomon sends out a group of fellow craft masons to search for him. The loose acacia is accidentally discovered, and the body exhumed to be given a decent burial. The hiding place of the "three ruffians" is also discovered, and they are brought to justice. Solomon informs his workforce that the secrets of a master mason are now lost. He replaces them with substitutes (based on gestures given and

words spoken upon the discovery of Hiram's body). Such is the general legend as related in the Anglo-American jurisdictions.

In **Continental Freemasonry** the tale is slightly different: a large number of master masons (not just Hiram) are working on the Temple, and the three ruffians are seeking the passwords and signs that will give them a higher wage. The result is the same, but this time it is master masons who find the body. The secrets are not lost, but Solomon orders them buried under the Temple, inscribed on Hiram's grave, and the same substitution is made as a mark of respect. The secrets "lost" in the other tradition are here given to new master masons as part of their ritual. In this version, Hiram is often renamed Adoniram.

Anderson's revised 1738 Constitutions describe the place of the Deputy Grand Master, to the left of the newly installed Grand Master **John Montagu, 2nd Duke of Montagu**, as the "Chair of Hiram Abiff".

**Hirams in the Bible** There are three separate references to people named Hiram that were involved in the construction of the temple of Solomon:

1. **Hiram, King of Tyre**, is credited in **2 Samuel 5:11** and **1 Kings 5:1-10** for having sent building materials and men for the original construction of the Temple in Jerusalem. In the Masonic drama, "Hiram, King of Tyre" is clearly distinguished from "Hiram Abiff". The former is clearly a king and the latter clearly a master craftsman. They can be confused in other contexts.
- In **1 Kings 7:13-14**, Hiram is described as the son of a widow from the tribe of **Naphtali** who was the son of a Tyrian bronze worker, sent for by Solomon to cast the bronze furnishings and ornate decorations for the new temple. From this reference, Freemasons often refer to Hiram (with the added Abiff) as "the widow's son." Hiram cast these bronzes in clay ground in the plain of the Jordan between **Succoth** and **Zarethan / Zeredathah** (1 Kings 7:46-47).
- **2 Chronicles 2:13-14** relates a formal request from King Solomon of Jerusalem to King Hiram I of Tyre, for workers and for materials to build a new temple. King Hiram (Hiram in Chronicles) responds "And now I have sent a skillful man, endowed with understanding, *Hiram 'abi* (the son of a woman of the daughters of Dan, and his father was a man of Tyre), skilled to work in gold and silver, bronze and iron, stone and wood, purple and blue, fine linen and crimson, and to make any engraving and to accomplish any plan which may be given to him, with your skillful men and with the skillful men of my lord David your father."<sup>1</sup> The phrase italicized above is translated in the **New King James Version** as "Hiram my master craftsman". Most translations of this passage take the "'ab-" in "'Abi" as the construct state of 'abba, here translated as master. Older translations preferred to translate "'ab-" as father. The common translation of the -i suffix is "my", giving the problematic reading that Hiram was sending his own father, also called Hiram. This is found in the **Vulgate**, the **Douay-Rheims Bible** and in **Wycliffe's Bible**. The other reading is as the old Hebrew genitive, and some variant of "of my father" is found in the **Septuagint**. The **Bishop's Bible** and the **Geneva Bible**. In his 1723 "Constitutions", **James Anderson** announced that many problems with this text would be solved by

reading "'Abi" as the second part of a proper name, which he rendered as "Hiram Abi", agreeing with the translations of [Martin Luther](#) and [Miles Coverdale's](#) reading of 2 Chronicles 4:16.<sup>[19]</sup>

### *Other accounts of a Biblical Hiram*

[Flavius Josephus](#) in his [Antiquities of the Jews](#) (Chapter 8:76) refers to Hiram as τεχνίτης, artificer, 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." The [Targum Sheni](#), an [Aramaic](#) commentary on the [Book of Esther](#) written sometime between the [fall of Rome](#) and the [Crusades](#), credits Hiram with the construction of a miraculous throne for Solomon, which in Esther's time is being used by the descendants of [Cyrus the Great](#).

The most elaborate version of the legend occurs in [Gerard de Nerval's](#) 1851 account, [Voyage en Orient](#), where he relates the tale, inserting all the masonic passwords, as part of the story of [Balkis](#), the "Queen of the Morning" and "[Soliman](#)", Prince of the [Genii](#). This is an elaboration of the second version above, where the Master Craftsman is named [Adoniram](#). Before his death, he undergoes mystical adventures as his tale is interwoven with that of Solomon and [Balkis](#), the [Queen of Sheba](#). The ruffians who kill him are under the instruction of Solomon himself. De Nerval relates the story as having been told in an Eastern coffee house over a two-week period. A similar account is given in [Charles William Heckethorn's](#) [The Secret Societies of all Ages and Countries](#), where Solomon plots to destroy Hiram because of the mutual love between Hiram and the Queen of Sheba.

### *Other theories*

According to authors [Robert Lomas](#) and [Christopher Knight](#), Hiram Abiff would have been Egyptian king [Seqenenre Tao II](#), who met an extremely similar death.<sup>[2]</sup> This idea is dismissed by most Masonic scholars. In his book [The Sufis](#), the [Afghan](#) scholar [Indris Shah](#) suggested that [Dhul-Nun al-Misri](#) might have been the origin of the character Hiram Abiff in the Masonic [Master Mason](#) ritual. The link, he believes, was through the [Sufi sect Al-Banna](#) ("The Builders") who built the [Al-Aqsa Mosque](#) and the [Dome of the Rock](#) in Jerusalem. This fraternity could have influenced some early Masonic guilds which borrowed heavily from the [Oriental architecture](#) in the creation of the [Gothic style](#).

The French Masonic historian [Paul Naudon](#) has highlighted the similarity between the death of Hiram and the murder of [Reynaud de Montauban](#) in the late 12th Century [Chanson de Geste](#), the [Four Sons of Aymon](#). Reynaud, like his prototype Saint [Reynolds](#), was killed by a hammer-blow to the head while working as a mason at [Cologne Cathedral](#), and his body hidden by his murderers before being miraculously re-discovered.