

Symbolism of the Hiramic Legend

by **Sir Knight James A. Nash**

My purpose here is to explain what I believe is the meaning that we should take from the Hiramic Legend. We can search the Bible and history books, but we will not find the story of Hiram Abiff as we tell it in the second section of our Master Mason Degree. Therefore, we must assume that this story is an allegory and that it will take study and contemplation to understand its true meaning.

This part of our degree work is just another way of telling the age old story of the struggle between good and evil. My purpose is to explain how I believe the main characters of the second section of the Master Mason Degree are used as symbols, their meaning, and how they are used to communicate the lesson that they are intended to impart.

Solomon King of Israel, Hiram King of Tyre, and Hiram Abiff represent wisdom, honesty, and perseverance. Collectively they represent all that is good and pure in the world. They epitomize brotherly love, relief, and truth. They represent the state of perfection that each of us should be striving to attain, even though we will never be able to reach it. The three principle fellowcrafts represent the labor that each of us must perform, the contemplation that we must exercise, and the care for all mankind's welfare so that we become a better person each day. We constantly grow in order to get closer to that state of perfection and to insure that the world is left a better place when we leave it. The three ruffians represent ignorance, prejudice, and greed. They are the forces of evil that are constantly attempting to undo and defeat the forces of good. Once we realize what each of these groups of characters represent, then we are able to contemplate their effects on the human condition.

The first ruffian represents ignorance. Ignorance in this context is the lack of knowledge of how to properly relate to and act toward others or how to consider the welfare of others. Ignorance allows a person to be easily led or influenced to commit offences that harm other people. These offences can take the form of plotting against someone, spreading rumors, lying, or other conduct that is detrimental to others or that may benefit the perpetrator at someone else's expense. Ignorance stifles the mental growth of a human being and helps prevent his ability to think beyond self. It also tends to foster an exaggerated sense of self entitlement which tends to encourage the type of behavior that ignorance perpetuates.

The second ruffian represents prejudice. Prejudice creates and encourages hate and intolerance. The practice of intolerance makes a person or group reject the opinion or belief of others summarily, without giving any thought as to their validity or value. Prejudice is a narrow mindedness that encourages hate because of race, religious or political beliefs, or some other reason that is unreasonable or invalid. It discourages a person from understanding his or her differences with others and blocks the growth and strength that understanding and acceptance can produce.

The third ruffian represents greed. Greed is the desire to obtain wealth or power by any means necessary. Greed can manifest itself through thievery, deception, swindling, or any other means which can result in one person or group attaining an unfair advantage over another.

In contrast, the three principle fellowcrafts collectively represent the attainment of knowledge and the individual's effort to improve by practicing the Masonic tenets of brotherly love, relief, truth, and morality. They epitomize the effort to battle the three ruffians in defense of good. They teach us to battle ignorance by gaining knowledge of how to properly treat and relate to others. They demonstrate that this is not an easy task but a lifelong effort to improve our ability to practice the knowledge we gain. They teach us to battle prejudice by the realization that every person should be treated equally without regard to their race, religious or political belief, wealth, or station in life. Every person should be treated as an individual and judged only by how they live their life and what they give to humanity. They teach us to battle greed by realizing that there are things in life that should be more valuable to us than wealth or power. Honor, integrity, and honesty are invaluable in the battle against evil. The respect we receive from others for possessing and utilizing these qualities will earn an individual the kind of love and respect from others that is more valuable than any amount of money or the possession of any object.

The three ruffians demonstrate that the forces of evil are always at work to influence the unsuspecting and the weak and to recruit them in the battle so that evil can triumph over good and chaos can then rule. They use powerful weapons and allurements to influence and win people to their side, and they are always present to capture anyone who might slip. The three fellowcrafts demonstrate that although the forces of evil are powerful and relentless, we can still prevail through perseverance and the diligent practice of virtue.

The last event in this part of our degree, when the individual receives the last secret of a Master Mason, represents the rebirth of the individual into a life where he is to work through the study, contemplation, and practice of these principles and virtues to continually improve. This practice is noticed by others and therefore influences and benefits all mankind. Honor, integrity, reputation, and respect are the benefit for the individual when he takes these lessons to heart and practices them in his daily life. The Master Mason practicing these virtues in his daily life will influence others to seek association with us in order to improve themselves.

Each individual is free to accept or reject these thoughts. I contend that this is a valid assessment of the symbolism of the Hiram legend and a reasonable interpretation of how we should utilize the lessons of the degree. Even if there is disagreement on this interpretation, there should be agreement that it does offer thought into the meaning of what we should learn from Masonry.

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