

HIRAM ABIFF

Presented by Illustrious Brother Donald Mumby 33°

WE ALL THINK WE KNOW HIRAM ABIFF – AFTERALL, WE REPRESENTED HIM IN THE THIRD DEGREE AND IN SCOTTISH RITE FREEMASONRY WE HAVE WITNESSED DEGREES COMMEMORATING HIS FUNERAL, A MEMORIAL SERVICE IN HIS HONOUR AND THE CAPTURE AND DEATH OF HIS ASSASSINS.

WE HAVE ALSO BEEN TOLD THAT HE WAS THE MASTER BUILDER, WHO ALONG WITH SOLOMON KING OF ISRAEL AND HIRAM KING OF TYRE, ERECTED THAT MAGNIFICENT TEMPLE IN JERUSALEM. BUT WE KNOW VERY LITTLE ELSE ABOUT HIM – SAVE HIS DEATH. SO WHY IS SO MUCH IMPORTANCE PLACED UPON SUCH AN OBSCURE INDIVIDUAL? WHERE DID HE COME FROM? AND DID HE REALLY EXIST?

THE OLD TESTAMENT BOOKS OF KINGS AND CHRONICLES TELL US A GREAT DEAL ABOUT THE BUILDING OF THE TEMPLE. KING SOLOMON AND HIRAM KING OF TYRE ARE RECORDED AT SOME LENGTH, BUT LITTLE MENTION IS MADE OF THE MASTER BUILDER. ACCORDING TO

THE AUTHOR OF THE SECOND BOOK OF CHRONICLES SOLOMON SENT A MESSENGER TO HIRAM, KING OF TYRE, TO ACQUAINT THAT FRIENDLY SOVEREIGN WITH THE FACT THAT HE WAS CONTEMPLATING ERECTING A TEMPLE AND INVITING HIM TO FURNISH MEN AND MATERIAL FOR THE WORK. SOLOMON'S FIRST DEMAND WAS FOR A SPECIALLY GIFTED CRAFTSMAN. "SEND ME NOW" HE SAYS, "A MAN CUNNING IN WORK IN GOLD, AND IN SILVER, AND IN BRASS, AND IN IRON, AND IN PURPLE, AND CRIMSON, AND BLUE....."

HIRAM REPLIED "I HAVE SENT A CUNNING MAN, ENDUED WITH UNDERSTANDING....THE SON OF A WOMAN OF THE DAUGHTERS OF DAN AND HIS FATHER WAS A MAN OF TYRE."

THE CLEAR POINTS TO EMERGE HERE IS THAT HIRAM WAS A SKILLED WORKER IN HIS PROFESSION WHO HAD SECURED THE PATRONGAGE OF THE KING TO SUCH AN EXTENT THAT HE WAS DEEMED WORTHY OF UPHOLDING THE REPUTATION OF HIS COUNTRY, AND THAT HE WAS OF MIXED PARENTAGE. THIS IS IMPORTANT AND HAS RAISED SOME

DEBATE AMONG RELIGIOUS SCHOLARS. IN CHRONICLES HE IS RECORDED AS BEING THE SON OF A WOMAN OF DAN, WHILE IN THE LATER BOOK OF KINGS, HE IS SHOWN AS BEING THE SON OF A WOMAN FROM THE TRIBE OF NAPHTHALI. QUITE A DISTINCTION, FOR IF HIS MOTHER WAS ONLY A MINOR PART OF THE TRIBE OF DAN, THEN HIRAM ABIFF WAS NOT TRULY JEWISH BUT WAS PART PHOENICIAN. HENCE IT IS CRITICAL THAT THE BUILDER'S MOTHER BE FROM THE TRIBE OF NAPHTHALI, FOR THEY WERE CONSIDERED PURE JEWISH AND IN THOSE DAYS TO BE CLOSE TO THE ROYAL COURT, JEWISHNESS WAS ALL IMPORTANT.

ALL OF THIS NOTWITHSTANDING HIRAM ARRIVED IN JERUSALEM AND, SO WE ARE TOLD MASONICALLY, WAS INTIMATELY INVOLVED WITH THE ERECTION OF THE TEMPLE. BUT THE AUTHORS OF "THE JEWISH ENCYCLOPEDIA" HAVE POINTED OUT THAT THERE IS AN ESSENTIAL DIFFERENCE AS REGARDS THE NATURE OF HIS TECHNICAL SPECIALTY. IN KINGS AND CHRONICLES IT IS RECORDED THAT HIRAM

WAS AN ARTIFICER ONLY IN BRASS AND THE PIECES HE EXECUTED FOR THE TEMPLE WERE THE TWO PILLARS, BOAZ AND JACHIN, THE MOLTEN SEA WITH THE TWELVE OXEN, THE TEN LEAVERS WITH THEIR BASES, THE SHOVELS AND THE BASINS; ALL OF BRASS. BUT IN THE SECOND BOOK OF CHRONICLES HE IS DEPICTED OF HAVING MANY TALENTS AND THE IDEA IS CONVEYED THAT HE SUPERINTENDED ALL THE WORKS OF THE TEMPLE. JOSEPHUS SOUGHT TO RECONCILE THESE TWO VIEWS BY SAYING HE WAS AN EXPERT IN ALL PHASES OF THE WORK, BUT THAT HIS CHIEF SKILL LAY IN WORKING IN GOLD, SILVER AND BRASS.

AND HERE OUR PRECISE KNOWLEDGE OF HIRAM ABIFF ENDS. HISTORY RECORDS NOTHING FURTHER OF HIM, AND THE HOLY BIBLE AS WELL AS OTHER AUTHORITATIVE SOURCES ARE SILENT AS TO HIS FATE.

SO WHY THEN HAS FREEMASONRY TAKEN THESE SLIM FACTS AND CREATED SUCH A WONDERFULLY VIVID CHARACTER? WHEN DID THIS OCCUR AND WHO WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR SO DOING?

NOW IT IS A GENERALLY ACCEPTED FACT THAT BEFORE THE ERA OF GRAND LODGES NOT MORE THAN ONE, OR PERHAPS, TWO DEGREES WERE IN EXISTENCE. THE MULTIPLICITY OF DEGREES WE EXPERIENCE TODAY SEEM TO HAVE BEEN DERIVED IN LARGE MEASURE FROM TWO MEN – DR. JAMES ANDERSON, A PRESBYTERIAN MINISTER AND AUTHOR OF THE FAMOUS *ANDERSON CONSTITUTIONS*, AND DR. JOHN THEOPHILUS DESAGULIERS, AN EPISCOPALIAN MINISTER. THEY SET OUT TO ENLARGE THE ORIGINAL HISTORY RECORDED IN THE DEGREE(S) AND REARRANGE THE CEREMONIALS BY EXPANDING WHAT WAS THEN THE SECOND DEGREE AND THEN DIVIDING THE WHOLE INTO WHAT IS NOW THE APPRENTICE, THE FELLOWCRAFT AND THE MASTER MASONS DEGREES. AND IT WAS SOMEWHERE IN THIS PERIOD THAT THE HIRAMIC LEGEND SEEMED TO HAVE BEEN INSERTED.

PROOF OF THIS IS GAINED BY COMPARING THE FIRST AND SECOND EDITIONS OF *ANDERSON'S CONSTITUTIONS*. IN THE FIRST ISSUED IN 1723 ANDERSON DWELLS AT SOME LENGTH UPON THE MAGNIFICENCE

OF THE TEMPLE WHILE IN THE LATTER WRITTEN IN 1738 A NUMBER OF ADDITIONAL DETAILS RELATIVE TO ITS ERECTION ARE GIVEN. THIS SUGGESTS THAT THE ERECTION OF THE TEMPLE HAD GROWN IN MASONIC CEREMONIAL IMPORTANCE THROUGHOUT THIS FIFTEEN YEARS.

IT IS GENERALLY ACCEPTED BY MASONIC SCHOLARS THAT THE THIRD DEGREE INCLUDING THE HIRAMIC LEGEND WERE INTRODUCED IN 1725. BUT FROM WHENCE DID THE LEGEND ARRIVE? FOR BEYOND CASUAL REFERENCES TO HIM, THE *OLD CHARGES* ARE SILENT CONCERNING HIRAM AND THERE IS NOTHING TO INDICATE THAT HE WAS COMMEMORATED IN ANY WAY OTHER THAN BEING MENTIONED AS A "MASTER OF GEOMETRY".

FOR YEARS, SOME HAVE INTIMATED THAT THE WHOLE LEGEND WAS BORROWED FROM THE ROSICRUCIANS WHO VIEWED THE BUILDING OF KING SOLOMON'S TEMPLE AS AN ALLEGORICAL PREFIGURATION OF CHRISTIANITY. INDEED TO THEM, THE NAME HIRAM IS AN ANAGRAM

DERIVED FROM TWO LATIN PHRASES WHICH WHEN COMBINED MEAN
“THE CHRIST”. IF ONE ACCEPTS THIS THEN THE WHOLE LEGEND
PARALLELS THE LIFE OF THE GREAT EXEMPLAR AND POINTS OUT THAT
MASONRY IS MORE THAN A BEAUTIFUL SYSTEM OF MORALITY VEILED
IN ALLEGORY AND ILLUSTRATED BY SYMBOLS, BUT SHOWS CLEARLY
THAT DEATH IS PREFERABLE TO DISHONOR AND THAT JUST AND
VIRTUOUS MEN, BY FOLLOWING THE LESSONS GAINED FROM THE
HIRAMIC LEGEND, MAY HOPE TO BE RECEIVED AS WORTHY BRETHREN
INTO THE GRAND LODGE ABOVE WHERE THE WORLD’S GREAT
ARCHITECT LIVES AND REIGNS FOREVER.