

The Death of Hiram Abiff

Without doubt, every Freemason vividly recalls that memorable evening when he was raised to the sublime degree of a Master Mason. Of course, he found it difficult to comprehend the full meaning of all the lectures and the truly remarkable ritual he took part in. Naturally, those who choose to go through the chairs and become the Worshipful Master of their Lodge learned more and became more acquainted with the true meaning of the great 'legend'. Many Masons, of course, undertake to do their own research without going through the chairs and are equally enlightened.

The central "experiences" in the ritual of the Master Masons Degree are the actions of the three 'ruffians'. Many of you, I am sure have played the part of one of the ruffians in our ritual. I decided to depict the ruffians in a picture for your mind, each with his respective "implement."



In my experience the implements were the twenty-four-inch gauge, square, and the setting maul. The only implement that does not specifically teach a lesson in the various Masonic lectures is the setting maul. So the question might be what would it teach? My answer here would be to respect the sanctity of life and the rights of others. Each of us figuratively holds a setting maul, and how we use it determines our character in the eyes of the world. It was the setting maul that delivered the final blow to Grand Master Hiram Abiff.

The three ruffians don't get a lot of good 'press' in this legend. Indeed, all I can recall seeing of them is in a painting in a book by Alan E. Roberts. In that picture they are fleeing the scene of their evil deed. Our Grand Master Hiram Abiff was later carried away and buried in the rubbish of the Temple.

The real Hiram Abiff, by the way, who worked on the Temple of Solomon, lived a long life and died of old age. Our illustrious brethren who created our Third Degree Ritual evidently wanted to include someone who did exist and then add a little excitement to the legend.

What is significant about the three ruffians is that they were trusted craftsmen. In other words, they were thought to be friends of Hiram, not enemies. In the ritual, they effectively represent greed, jealousy, and selfishness. Hiram was a highly honorable man, but this was no defense against their treachery. The lesson here is that one's adversaries often come from within, and resisting evil intentions can be extremely difficult, if not impossible.

Hiram lost his life, and yet retained his honor. After Hiram's body was taken by the ruffians to the hills and buried in a shallow grave, they attempted to flee the country, but were refused passage. This forced them to remain and they were eventually captured and brought to justice. The lesson here is that evil has no escape. It may take a very long time for righteousness to prevail and overcome, but it always does.

The search for the ruffians by King Solomon's men was not easy. Had not the ruffians left a clue, they might never have been found. We have to ask why they decided to leave a clue. Obviously, it was a mistake, and herein lies the answer. Wrongdoing always leaves a clue of some sort that will result in its downfall. That the clue they left was of the type in the ritual was really quite ingenious on the part of those who created our ritual.

The ruffians intended it to be an inconspicuous mark....something that no one would notice. The only reason it became conspicuous is because one of King Solomon's men inadvertently took hold of it and noticed something was amiss. The odds that this would happen would be extremely remote, but life is like that, in other words, we just don't know what's going to happen.

The symbols in the description I shared with you are obvious to any Freemason. The ruffians show extreme anguish as a result of their evil deed. With art, it is always the thought that counts and this is simply an expression of the triumph of good over evil. As Masons recall their passage from the West to the East, they can't help but reflect on the influence of the three ruffians.

My Brethren, this brings to a close the series of educational programs that I began writing and presenting in 2004. In all there were 112 programs that have been written for use here in Tuckahoe, some as presentations in other Lodges, and several articles were published in Grand Lodge publications in Virginia, Ohio, Michigan, and Australia.

As I have mentioned before, the practices we follow are not odd or meaningless. They are ancient and significant parts of Masonic history. So, let us keep them....but we must also explain them. This is the reason I sought to uncover and share my 'Nuggets from the Quarry of Freemasonry'.

It has been my great pleasure to create and share these stories with you and Masons around the world. I hope they have been, of course educational, but perhaps more thought provoking and may have helped to expand your understanding of our gentle Craft.



..... #94 in a series of 'Nuggets from the Quarry of Freemasonry'.SM

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