



Were There Two Hiram's of Tyre?

By Lee Anderson, PM

I am admittedly a history nut. All kinds of history, including Masonic history. One day, while grazing on Google, I ran across a site called "Masonic Dictionary dot com" On it I found a paper titled "The Four Hiram's of Tyre". That got my attention and I was instantly hooked. The paper was written by Brother Andrew S MacBride. Who I learned was one of the most influential Masons in Scottish history. His paper was based on works of two Jewish Rabbi's.

The original idea was proposed by Rabbi Mein Lobe Malbium, who was born in 1809 and died in 1879. He was the Chief Rabbi of Bucharest, which was then a part of Romania. He was not a Mason. Rabbi Malbium's work was later translated and expanded by Brother Reverend Rabbi Morris Rosenblum, Head of the Hollier Hebrew School of the University of London. Rabbi Rosenblum was also Chaplain of the Northumberland Scottish Rite!

His paper was written in 1904 and published in 1905. In it, he called attention to the Masonic Fraternity of the possibility of two Kings of Tyre and two Chief Architects, all named Hiram during the building of Solomon's Temple.

I have to admit my own ignorance of this period of antiquity but we need some knowledge about the people involved, as well as, a timeline. Our story is from the middle of the Bronze Age to the beginning of the Iron Age, about 1500 BCE to 900 BCE.

In this story, there are three groups of people, the Canaanites, the Phoenicians, and the Isrealites. I also discovered all three were distantly related to each other.

The oldest group is the Canaanites. Evidence suggests they started as an Egyptian colony around 2300 BCE. They weren't a country at all, but a very loose confederation of tribes and city states. They occupied an area from the northeast tip of Egypt, north along the Mediteranian to the southern boundary of modern day Lebanon, eastward to the River Jordan

and around the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea. They were named for Noah's grandson, Canaan. The land they occupied would later be claimed by the Israelites declaring it was the land God had chosen for them. This would also be the catalyst for the events that followed.

The next group are the Phoenicians. They were also a confederation of tribes and city states, but were much better organized. They were thought to have begun as a splinter group of the Canaanites but they stuck to the coast. They became fishermen, tradesmen, and merchants. Their seafaring ability became legendary. They developed two port cities, Tyre and Sidon. Tyre soon became the largest city because of its sheltered harbor. They soon drew tradesmen, architects, stone masons, carpenters, textile workers and metalsmiths. They also discovered they had a snail that only grew in the area between Tyre and Sidon. When the snails were crushed in large quantities, they produced a small amount of a very intense and expensive purple dye, hence the term "Royal Purple". They also gave us the first written alphabet.

The Phoenicians were especially known for their seafaring abilities and merchant fleets. They were the first to navigate the open sea. Recently some Phoenician coins have been discovered. On one side of the coin is a rendition of a map showing their then trade area. On an area separated from the rest is a depiction of what looks like Florida and the Gulf Coast. Makes you wonder! The Phoenicians predated the Israelites by as much as 800 years. Phoenicia in Greek translates as "purple".

The third group were the Israelites. It is thought that Moses was born around 1500 BCE, leading the Exodus around 1450 BCE. Wandering through the wilderness for forty years, they arrive at Canaan. Moses dies, not being able to enter the Promised Land. Joshua then leads the Tribes of Israel into Canaan and conquers it. They began their conquest in the South,

moving North, then West around the Dead Sea, across the River Jordan, and finally to the city state of Jericho.

Jericho, a very ancient settlement pre-dated the Canaanites by as much as two thousand years. It was part of a region known as the "Fertile Crescent". Birthplace of modern agriculture. The reason for its importance then, and still today, is water. Jericho was the last battle for Canaan. We have all heard the story of Joshua bringing down the thirty foot high, six foot thick walls with trumpets and horns. After breaching the walls they killed every living thing, ransacked the city for its gold, silver and jewels, then they burned the city to the ground. This battle took place around 1407 BCE. After Jericho had been taken and destroyed, the Israelites reverted back to their tribal ways.

After Joshua's death, the Israelites were loosely led for three hundred years by charismatic leaders called Judges. The Judges weren't magistrates as we know them today. But were those who felt called by God and able to rally two or three tribes together to fight off a common enemy. In total there were ten Judges. Most noted among them were Gideon, Deborah, and the last Samson. With the death of Samson, the Israelites decided they wanted a King. The Chief Priest Samuel warned them to be very careful for what they wished. They persisted, so Samuel chose Saul, who would govern them for forty three years.

In the beginning Saul proved to be a strong leader. About twenty five years into his reign, the Israelites were attacked by their worst enemy, the Philistines and their champion Goliath. We probably all know that story. Saul, however, had one major problem. He was manic depressive. Saul, in gratitude for David's victory, invited him into his household. The real reason however, was because of David's musical ability and his positive effect on Saul's depression. In time, David grew in status with the rest of the Israelites. Saul grew worried.

First, Saul offered David one of his daughters as a bride. David refused. Later, Saul offered David another daughter and David reluctantly accepted. Soon after, Saul tried to kill him. David sent his bride back to Saul and fled into the wilderness. In time, David would gather several tribes into his alliance. Saul and his three sons would all die in battle, again, with the Philistines. David would then become the first King of the unified Kingdom of Israel.

With this as our background, let's take a look at the possibility of the Kings of Tyre during this building period. Around four hundred and fifty years had elapsed from the Israelites entry into Canaan to the time of David. In that elapsed time what remained of the Canaanites had been absorbed by the Israelites through marriage. For the same reasons, strong bonds were also formed with the Phoenicians.

King David and Hiram, King of the city state of Tyre had also formed strong bonds through trade. Tyre had secured a trade route through Israel. Which gave them better access to the South and East trade routes. Tyre paying Israel tribute for the privilege which was a win-win for both. It was also thought David and Hiram were about the same age.

About four years after David was King, he decided he needed a "house". In other words, he needed a palace. The Israelites were not builders, the Phoenicians were. David wanted experienced builders to help in all phases of the building. He wanted fine building materials, beautiful furnishings, as well as, the artisan builders. David enlisted the help of his ally Hiram of Tyre. In the Second Book of Samuel, verse two we read: "And Hiram of Tyre sent messengers to David, and cedar trees, and carpenters, and masons, and they built David a house." This project took about four years to complete. It is from this structure David would see Bathsheba and in which he would seduce her. The resulting offspring was Solomon. David would rule another thirty years.

Upon David's death, Solomon became King. Earlier, David said he wanted to build God a temple. God said "no", David had too much blood on his hands. About four years into Solomon's rule, he decides to build God's Temple. Solomon asks for Hiram's help. In Second Chronicles, Chapter eleven verse three, it is recorded: "And Solomon sent to Hiram King of Tyre saying, as thou didst deal with David my father, and didst send him cedars to build him a house to dwell therein, even so deal with me."

It is generally agreed that the building of the grounds and core of the Temple took seven years. Then came the second part, consisting of the carpenter work; the roof, the chambers, the decorations and finally the internal fittings and coverings. This would take another thirteen years. Twenty years in total. At the same time, they also built Solomon a palace.

When the temple was completed there is a passage in First Kings, chapter nine verse ten: "It came to pass at the end of twenty years, when Solomon had built two houses, one for the Lord and the King's house, that then Solomon gave Hiram twenty cities in the land of Galilee. And Hiram came out of Tyre to see the cities which Solomon had given him; and they pleased him not. And he said: What cities are these which thou hast given me, my brother? And he called them the land of Cabul, unto this day." The word Cabul expresses contempt meaning "that which does not please."

Now here is Rabbi Malbriem and Rabbi Rosenbaum's reasoning for the possibilities of two King's of Tyre named Hiram. First is the total length of time, from the building of David's Palace to the completion of the Temple, a span of roughly fifty seven years. A very long time for one man to be King. Hiram would have been in his late seventies or older when he was given the twenty cities Cabul. At that age, it would be unlikely for him to travel the great distance and rough terrain to view them.

Their final argument for the two Kings is this, and it comes from the Torah. There is a phrase found in the Fifth Chapter of Kings which states: "...for Hiram was ever a lover of David." They both felt that this was not spoken as one old friend would say about another. Rather that of a more youthful admirer of David. We also know Hiram's father was named Abi-Baal. It has been suggested that this is an honorary name which means "Exalted Ruler", and his proper name was Hiram.

The conclusion the Rabbi's would draw is that they probably were not the same man, but were both King's of Tyre and given the name of Hiram, most likely father and son. In addition, the early Jewish historian Josephus stated Hiram I, son of Abi-Baal, reigned from 970 BCD to 935 BCE. David's palace started construction in the eleventh year of Hiram's reign. They did not think this could be the same Hiram because by sacred narrative, David's Palace was built thirty four years before the start of construction of the Temple.

Their conclusion then, is this: David and Hiram were friends that were about the same age. After David captured Jerusalem, Hiram of Tyre sent him building materials, carpenters, and Masons to build him a "house". Twenty six years later, Hiram dies, and is succeeded by his son, also named Hiram. Seven years later, David dies. There is also a letter which was sent to Solomon from Hiram King of Tyre which states, "And now I have sent a cunning man, endued with understanding of Hiram my father's." This is a clear indication that the predecessor of the Tyrian throne was also called Hiram.

Now for the argument of the possibility of two architects named Hiram. Both David and Solomon relied on products and building expertise from Tyre. In the traditions of Masonry, the degrees are built around the building of Solomon's Temple and especially the personage of Hiram Abiff. For many, the traditions of Hiram Abiff are considered to be a mythological legend

used to focus on important truths, but of little historical relevance. Both Rabbi Malbrim and Rabbi Rosenblum think the Scriptures say otherwise.

Old testament records in the books of Chronicles, Kings and Second Samuel denote Hiram Abiff as a “cunning man, endued with understanding of working in gold and in silver, in brass, in iron, in stone, in timber, in purple, in blue, and in fine linen, and in crimson and also to grave any manner of graving, and find out every device.” To say the least, a very highly skilled artisan. The story of Hiram is however rather cloudy, as we shall soon discover.

First, the description of his parentage in Second Chronicles, Hiram is said to be “the son of a woman of the daughters of Dan.” In First King’s however, he is described as “the son of a widow woman of the tribe of Naphlali”. How could the same man have two mothers? This is how they try to reconcile the differences.

In Judaism, lineage is of utmost importance. The writers of King’s and Chronicles had an intimate knowledge of such things and would not make a mistake, especially as to the mother’s lineage. The tribe of Dan occupied the hilly country near the Philistines. The last Judge of Israel, Samson, was a member of that tribe. They also were in close proximity with Tyre. Because of this, over time, there would be intermarriage between the groups.

The tribe of Naphlali was located along the northern border of Palestine and also had close relationships with Tyre, which also resulted in intermarriage. In this case, the fathers were not mentioned, meaning that they were not Jewish. However, the mothers were and the children were raised Jewish. This was their first idea that we aren’t talking about the same person. The first Hiram is a highly skilled artisan, who had knowledge in all phases of building, an architect, a marvel, a genius, a man of great experience and no doubt, ripe in years. He may be the architect sent to help David build his palace.

What about their idea of a second Hiram? Thirty four years had elapsed from the building of David's Palace and the start of the building of the Temple. There is a passage which states "And King Solomon sent and fetched Hiram out of Tyre." There is a second passage in the Torah that may describe a second Hiram. He was described as a craftsman who was "a worker in brass, and he was filled with wisdom and understanding, and cunning to works in brass." In considering these two descriptions, are they the same person? If Hiram was so highly involved in the building of first the Palace, and secondly the Temple, would he have gone back to Tyre? The Rabbi's both felt that this was not likely.

They postulated that the conflicting descriptions may mean two people. The first is the architect. While the second was one that was highly skilled in working in brass. The very same skills used to cast the pillars, the huge brazen basin, and the twelve oxen that it rested on, as well as, the other ornaments and utensils. It is highly likely, because of the differences in skill-sets, time, and parentage, that they may not be the same person.

Rabbi Rosenbaum has this theory that the first Hiram had disappeared. The traditions of Masonry supply a very clear and natural answer. The first Hiram was dead. Solomon had to send for the second Hiram to finish the work. There is a passage in King's that could also lend an answer. It lists that some of the utensils made for the Temple were of "bright brass", a gilding skill attributed to the first Hiram. But because of the single remark "his father", used to differentiate the cast work of the pillars, the great Basin, the oxen, and the other cast works from as being of "bright brass"

In all the variations of Masonic tradition, the Hiram who's death occurred immediately preceding the completion of the Temple was named "Hiram Abiff". This becomes significant only in view of the fact that another Hiram, maybe his son, was also superintendent at the

building of the Temple and finished the work. This could also lend credence to the second Hiram as being called the "widow's son".

There have been disagreements to Rabbi Malbrium and Rabbi Rosenbaum's thesis. Their main argument is the conclusions they have drawn are a stretch. Sadly there is no first hand writing of the event, most recorded hundreds of years later. When you have two or more Rabbinical scholars debating a point there is hardly every consensus.

For me, I have found the idea interesting and I will let you draw your own conclusion in our quest for Masonic light.