

WILLIAM O WARE LODGE OF RESEARCH

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Darrin V. Gulla, Ph.D.

The most obvious lesson from the Legend of Hiram Abiff is the importance of honor and integrity even in the face of death itself – Hiram is an ideal on whom we should model our behavior. These are certainly admirable traits which we should emulate in our own daily lives, but is it the principal lesson of the Legend? Is there anything more we can learn from the story?

If we examine some of the other players within the Legend, we might be able to discover larger themes which can make us better men and Masons. The Three Ruffians, in particular, provide such an opportunity. So, who are these Three Ruffians, what do they represent, and what can we learn from their actions in the Legend? Note that there are a number of answers and interpretations to these questions, but I focus here on a combination of approaches that makes the most sense to me.

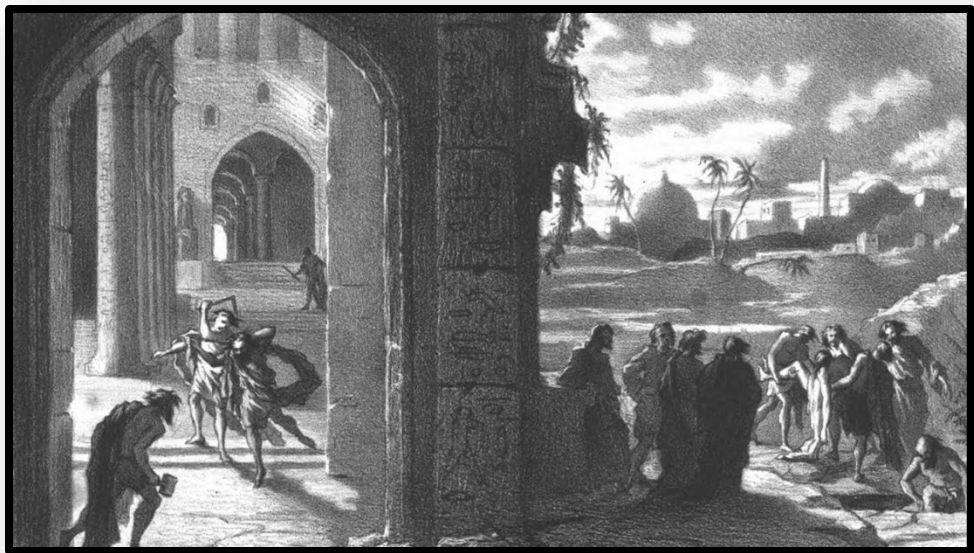
Who are the Three Ruffians?

The names of the Three Ruffians themselves may provide some insights as to who these men are. In his work *Freemasonry: Its Hidden Meaning*,

George Steinmetz expands upon the etymology of the names of the Three Ruffians proposed by Albert Pike (*Book of the Words*) which concludes that these men were natives of Tyre (their Hebrew equivalent names are a combination of yod - meaning deity, bal – referring to the Canaanite fertility god Baal, and an individual identifier). Steinmetz further notes that the Three Ruffians are unique among the other Fellowcrafts who all possess Hebrew names.

What do the Three Ruffians Represent?

Who these Three Ruffians are gives us an idea of what they might represent. Manly P. Hall in *The Lost Keys of Freemasonry* asserts that the Three Ruffians symbolize three expressions of our lower



natures – thought, desire, and action. These elements of our baser natures form what Hall refers to as a “Triangular Prison” through which “the light cannot shine, and the Life is forced to languish in the dim darkness of despair.” The Three Ruffians, thus, stand in diametric opposition to the “Flaming Triangle” of spiritual thought, constructive emotion, and useful daily labor. These aspects are elements of our higher natures and are symbolized by King Solomon, Hiram King of Tyre, and Hiram Abiff. This characterization is consistent with Steinmetz’ identification where the Three Ruffians, as men of Tyre, worship Baal, a material god of this lower realm, while the other Fellowcrafts, as men of Israel, worship Yahweh, a spiritual God of a higher realm.

What can we learn from the Three Ruffians?

Now that we have an idea of who the Three Ruffians are and what they might represent, we can extract additional lessons from the Legend. The late WB Jim Tresner posits that the Three Ruffians, more specifically Jubalum, pass along larger lessons than the simple one of Hiram Abiff. Tresner arrives at this conclusion by first suggesting that the Legend should be considered in the context of a classical tragedy where (1) the action of the story comes about because of the character or personality flaw of those involved, (2) there is a tragic fall and death, and (3) the hero comes to a new understanding of himself¹. The hero under this framework then cannot be Hiram Abiff. Tresner concludes that Jubalum better fits the classical tragic hero – his flaw is impatience and lack of faith and trust; he gains insights into his character when contemplating his role in the death of Hiram Abiff; he pronounces his own sentence and accepts his own death.

In addition to the simple lesson of honor and integrity, the Legend instructs us to recognize and understand the flaws of our lower nature which imprison us in order to liberate the higher nature trapped within us. In short, we are at the same time both Hiram Abiff and the Three Ruffians with two aspects struggling to determine who and what we are. As Freemasons we must be mindful of our lesser sentiments and strive for that higher nature where we can finish the Temple which is in fact ourselves, where we conceptualize our place within the Cosmos, and where we recognize the Divine Spark inside each and every one of us so that we can give glory and honor to the Grand Architect of the Universe above.

References:

Hall, Manly P. (1923). *The Lost Keys of Freemasonry*. New York, NY: Macoy Publishing and Masonic Supply Company.

Joyce, Steven (2017). *Brothers and Men of Tyre: The Three Ruffians and Their Role in the Hiramic Legend*. Western New York Lodge of Research.

Pike, Albert (1992). *The Book of the Words*. Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing.

Steinmetz, GH (1982). *Freemasonry: It’s Hidden Meaning*. Richmond, VA: Macoy Publishing and Supply Company.

¹ This isn’t a huge stretch here as Medieval Mystery plays would have taken one of three forms – comedy, history, or tragedy. By process of elimination, the Legend of Hiram must be a Tragedy.

Tresner, J (n.d.) *The Tragedy of the Third Degree*. Unpublished Manuscript.

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