

BIBLICAL CHARACTERS FOR ROYAL, SELECT & SUPER EXCELLENT MASTERS

ADONIRAM: SERVICE

Adoniram provides an example of a man performing unpleasant and unpopular service and persisting in performing it until it caused his death.

Adoniram, whose name means "The Lord is exalted", was also known as Adoram or Hadoram. He was the son of Abda, but, beyond this, nothing is known of his origins or early life. He occupied a high, if onerous, position under reigns of David and Solomon and apparently that of Rehoboam, serving over fifty years as Overseer of forced and slave labor, and as tax collector. The length of his service has caused some authorities to believe that two Adonirams, one the son of the other, are indicated; but nothing, other than his long service, appears to support this.

Under David and Solomon, Adoniram was the officer over the tribute or levy, as well as supervisor of labor on public works. He served as tax collector under Rehoboam, a change of position that may have been only a change of title. The jobs of Tax collector and Collector of the Tribute or levy appear to have been identical and closely related to that of supervision of forced labor. Taxes were collected not only in money, but also in goods, services and labor, through the forced loan of servants and slaves. The need for money, building materials and workers of all types became acute when Solomon began to build the Temple. It often became expedient to assess those compelled to pay tribute for materials, services, laborers and artisans, rather than money. As a result, the jobs of tax collector and supervisor of forced labor tended to merge, with Adoniram serving in this dual position under David and Solomon.

Adoniram served his King, his nation and his people, and, through them, his God. To a devout Israelite, this would provide a compelling motivation. In Masonic ritual he exemplifies integrity and fidelity in fulfilling his duty

Biblical References: II Samuel: 20, I Kings: 4; 5; 12, II Chronicles: 10.

AHISHAR: ANONYMOUS EFFICIENCY

Ahishar, whose name means, "my brother has sung", appears to have been one of those who served with nearly anonymous efficiency. The Bible mentions him only once, in I Kings: 4: 6, where it identifies him as being "over the household", of King Solomon. The nature of his position, the complexities and difficulties of it and the absence of any other mention of him give a strong indication that he performed his functions with the utmost efficiency.

The administration of Solomon's household involved numerous and burdensome responsibilities. As Overseer of the household, Ahishar had the task of feeding, housing, and seeing to daily needs of thousands of Solomon's courtiers, guests, functionaries and servants, as well as the needs of Solomon himself and his family. Problems undoubtedly arose constantly, and Ahishar, beyond the brief statement in I Kings: 4, provides strong evidence that he performed efficiently and effectively in his job, forestalling trouble before it attracted attention.

AHISHAR (continued)

Ahishar appears frequently in Masonic ritual, never as a leading figure, but almost always as a vital supporting one. These appearances do not directly illustrate the themes of the degrees, but they are necessary for the smooth and expeditious flow of the dramas and development of the moral lessons contained in them.

Biblical References: I Kings: 4.

GEDALIAH

There are five persons of the name of Gedaliah who are mentioned in Scripture, but only two of them were contemporary with the destruction of the temple.

Gedaliah the son of Pashur is mentioned by the prophet Jeremiah (38:1) as a prince of the court of Zedekiah. He was present at its destruction, and is known to have been one of the advisers of the king. It was through his counsels, and those of his colleagues, that Zedekiah was persuaded to deliver up the prophet Jeremiah to death, from which he was rescued only by the intercession of a eunuch of the palace.

The other Gedaliah was the son of Ahikam. He seems to have been greatly in favor with Nebuchadnezzar, for after the destruction of Jerusalem, and the deportation of Zedekiah, he was appointed by the Chaldean monarch as his satrap or governor over Judea. He took up his residence at Mizpah, where he was shortly afterwards murdered by Ishmael, one of the descendants of the house of David.

The question now arises, which of these two is the one referred to in the ceremonies of a Council of Super-Excellent Masters? I think there can be no doubt that the founders of the degree intended the second officer of the Council to represent the former, and not the latter; Gedaliah the son of Pashur, and not Gedaliah, the son of Ahikam; the Prince of Judah, and not the Governor of Judea.

We are forced to this conclusion by various reasons. The Gedaliah represented in the degree must have been a resident of Jerusalem during the siege, and at the very time of the assault, which immediately preceded the destruction of the temple and the city. Now, we know that Gedaliah the son of Pashur was with Hezekiah as one of his advisers. On the other hand, it is most unlikely that Gedaliah the son of Ahikam could have been a resident of Jerusalem, for it is not at all probable that Nebuchadnezzar would have selected such a one for the important and confidential office of a satrap or governor. We should rather suppose that Gedaliah the son of Ahikam had been carried away to Babylon after one of the former sieges; that he had there, like Daniel, gained by his good conduct the esteem and respect of the Chaldean monarch; that he had come back to Judea with the army; and that, on the taking of the city, he had been appointed governor by Nebuchadnezzar. Such being the facts, it is evident that he could not have been in the council of King Zedekiah, advising and directing his attempted escape.

The modern revivers of the degree of Super-Excellent Master have, therefore, been wrong in supposing that Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, and afterwards Governor of Judea, was the person represented by the second officer of the Council. He was Gedaliah, the son of Pashur, a wicked man, one of Zedekiah's princes, and was most probably put to death by Nebuchadnezzar, with the other princes and nobles whom he captured in the plains of Jericho.

JEHOIAKIM

Jehoiakim, originally named Eliakim, was the eldest son and natural successor of Josiah, King of Judah. Both Jehoiakim and Eliakim means "Jehovah raises up." When his father, Josiah, died in battle against Pharaoh Necho of Egypt at Megiddo, the people raised Eliakim's younger brother, Jehoahaz, to the throne, presumably because Jehoahaz favored fighting the Egyptians and Eliakim did not. Necho deposed Jehoahaz after only three months, however; took him as a prisoner to Egypt, and replaced him as king with Eliakim, whose name he changed to Jehoiakim. The new king ruled Judah from 609 BC to 597 BC.

Jehoiakim remained subject to Egypt for four years, until Nebuchadnezzar of Chaldea or neo-Babylonia defeated the Egyptians at Carchemish, ending Egyptian hegemony over Syria and Palestine. During that four years of Egyptian domination, Necho had imposed a heavy tribute on Judah. Jehoiakim had raised this tribute and increased his personal luxury at the same time by systematic and oppressive taxation. This set the pattern for the rest of his reign, which became one of harshness, injustice, and exploitation.

The Prophet Jeremiah denounced Jehoiakim for this, as well as warning that Nebuchadnezzar would subjugate Judah, and urging that Judah accept the inevitable and avoid resistance. Jehoiakim resented Jeremiah's statements. When Jeremiah, observing God's command, had Baruch compile a manuscript of Jeremiah's prophecies and read it in the Temple, Jehoiakim seized and burned the document. He also tried to capture Jeremiah and Baruch; but, guided by God, they escaped and hid. While in hiding, Jeremiah and Baruch rewrote the document that Jehoiakim had burned, and added a prediction of doom for Jehoiakim and his line.

Nebuchadnezzar subjugated Judah soon afterwards, but left Jehoiakim on the throne as his tributary. Jehoiakim, although outwardly accepting his subject status, chafed under it. After three years of submission to Nebuchadnezzar's rule, Jehoiakim rebelled. Other parts of Nebuchadnezzar's empire apparently revolted about the same time. Nebuchadnezzar sent detachments into Judah to subdue the revolt there, while he led his main army against the rebelling Phoenicians. After investing Tyre, beginning a siege that would last 13 years, Nebuchadnezzar moved directly against Judah. The rebellion then collapsed.

Jehoiakim's fate remains uncertain, although he certainly died or was killed about this time. Biblical authority can be found as evidence that he died peacefully; that he was killed on battle against the Chaldeans and that he was carried off to Babylon bound in a cage and was killed in route, or that Nebuchadnezzar executed him. Whatever happened, his son, Jehoiachin, succeeded him.

In Masonic ritual, Jehoiakim is mentioned as one of the last three kings of Judah, and a participant in the sequence of events that led to the destruction of the Temple and the sacking of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar.

Biblical Reference: II Kings: 23:24, II Chronicles: 36, Jeremiah: 22: 36.

JEHOIACHIN

Jehoiachin, whose name means "Jehovah has appointed," was the son of Jehoiakim and the latter's successor as king of Judah. He ruled for only three months and ten days before Nebuchadnezzar forced him to capitulate and accept exile in Babylon.

Jehoiachin's father, Jehoiakim, had rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar, after submitting to Chaldean rule for about three years. Nebuchadnezzar moved to crush this revolt, after first taking measures to put down another rebellion in Phoenicia and sending detachments to deal with Judah. The revolt began to collapse when Nebuchadnezzar led his main army into Judah, and Jehoiakim died or was killed. Jehoiachin, then about eighteen years old then became king.

The collapse of the revolt in Judah left Jerusalem defenseless when Nebuchadnezzar appeared before the city with his army. Jehoiachin surrendered, accepted exile for himself and about 10,000 of his subjects, and offered no resistance to the looting of the Temple in order to spare the City and the Temple from complete destruction. Nebuchadnezzar named Zedekiah, Jehoiachin's uncle, as King of Judah; then carried Jehoiachin, his family, his officials, and the rest of the exiles off to captivity in Babylon. Jehoiachin remained in prison there until Nebuchadnezzar's death, a period of thirty-six years. A more accurate account of his fate is portrayed in the Super Excellent Drama. The date and circumstances of Jehoiachin's death are not known.

In the Masonic ritual, Jehoiachin is mentioned both in connection with the events that led to the destruction of the Temple and as the grandfather of Zerubbabel, a relationship that made Zerubbabel heir to the throne of Judah, and the natural leader of the Jewish people in his time.

Biblical References: Same as Jehoiakim

NATHAN

The meaning of Nathan is "**God has given**". Nathan was a court prophet who lived in the time of King David. He is introduced in 2 Samuel 7:2 and 1 Chronicles 17:1 as an advisor to David, with whom David reflects on the contrast between his own comfortable home and the tent in which the Ark of the Covenant is accommodated. Nathan then announced to David the covenant God was making with him (2 Samuel 7:4–17, a passage known as *Nathan's Oracle*), contrasting David's proposal to build a house for the Ark with God's plan.

Later, he came to David to reprimand him for committing adultery with Bathsheba while she was the wife of Uriah the Hittite, whose death the King had also arranged to hide his previous transgression (2 Samuel 12:7–14).

According to Chronicles, Nathan wrote histories of the reigns of both David (1 Chronicles 29:29) and Solomon (2 Chronicles 9:29), and was involved in the music of the temple (see 2 Chronicles 29:25).

In 1 Kings 1:8–45 it is Nathan who tells the dying David of the plot of Adonijah to become king, resulting in Solomon being proclaimed king instead. Nathan presides at the anointing of King Solomon, and his name appears in Handel's coronation anthem "Zadok the Priest".

Biblical Reference: 2ND Samuel, 1ST & 2ND Chronicles, 1 Kings

NEBUZARADAN

A Captain, or, as we would now call him, a general of Nebuchadnezzar, who commanded the Chaldean army at the siege of Jerusalem, and who executed their orders of his sovereign by the destruction of the city and Temple, and by carrying the Inhabitants, except a few husbandmen, as captives to Babylon.

NEBUCHADNEZZAR

About 630 years before Christ, the Empire and City of Babylon were conquered by Nebuchadnezzar, the King of the Chaldeans, a nomadic race, who, descending from their homes in the Caucasian Mountains, had overwhelmed the countries of Southern Asia.

Nebuchadnezzar was engaged during his whole reign in wars of conquest. Among other nations which fell beneath his victorious arms was Judea, whose King, Jehoiakim, was slain by Nebuchadnezzar, and his son, Jehoichin, ascended the Jewish throne. After a reign of three years, he was deposed by Nebuchadnezzar, and his kingdom given to his uncle, Zedekiah, a monarch distinguished for his vices.

Having repeatedly rebelled against the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar repaired to Jerusalem, and, after a siege of eighteen months, reduced it. The city was leveled with the ground, the Temple pillaged and burned, and the inhabitants carried captive to Babylon. These events are commemorated in the first section of the English and American Royal Arch system.

ZABUD: DISCRETION

Zabud appears to have been an advisor whose sound judgement and the ability to preserve a prudent silence served his King well.

Zabud, whose name means "given" was the son of Nathan, - probably the prophet Nathan, - and lived during the reigns of Kings David and Solomon. He may also be the Zabud, also identified as a son of Nathan, who is listed as one of David's "mighty men" although this is not certain.

Zabud served as a "priest" or "principal officer" at King Solomon's court, and held the prestigious confidential post of the "King's friend." This is considered to be the same as the post held by Hushai the Archite during the reign of David. The post of "King's friend" appears to have been an important one in oriental courts, although it was generally an informal position, based upon a personal relationship, rather than an official office with definite responsibilities.

The informality of the position gave it much of its power. The personal relationship would continue only so long as the King retained complete confidence in the "friend" That confidence, in turn, gave the "friend" great influence with the King. The personal nature of the relationship also gave the "friend" more frequent and more favorable access to the King than that enjoyed by those holding more formal positions. His influence, therefore, usually exceeded that of any other member of the King's court.

ZABUD (continued)

No details are known about Zabud's life and actions, other than those implicit in his position as "King's friend" to King Solomon. Nor is anything known about the advice that he gave to Solomon, - silence on that is implicit in Zabud's position, but he must have enjoyed great prestige and influence. He undoubtedly contributed significantly to the successes, and the failures, of King Solomon's reign.

In the Masonic ritual, Zabud appears frequently as the trusted confidante of King Solomon. He does not directly demonstrate or epitomize any of the lessons of the degrees; but his presence in a position of support is important in all, and essential in some.

Biblical References: I Kings: 4. I Chronicles: 2:11.

ZEDEKIAH

A personage in some of the advanced Degrees, whose melancholy fate is described in the Second Book of Kings and in the prophecies of Jeremiah. He was the twentieth and last King of Judah. When Nebuchadnezzar had in his second siege of Jerusalem deposed Jehoiachin, whom he carried as a captive to Babylon, he placed Zedekiah on the throne in his stead.

By this act Zedekiah became tributary to the King of the Chaldees, who exacted from him a solemn oath of fidelity and obedience. This oath he observed no longer than till an opportunity occurred of violating it. In the language of the author of the Books of Chronicles, "he rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him swear by God" (Second Chronicles xxxvi, 13).

This course soon brought down upon him the vengeance of the offended monarch, who invaded the land of Judah with an immense army. Remaining himself at Riblah, a town of the northern hoarder of Palestine, he sent the army under his general, Nebuzaradan, to Jerusalem, which was invested by the Babylonian forces. After a siege of about one year, during which the inhabitants endured many hardships the city was taken by an assault, the Chaldeans entering it through breaches in the northern wall.

It is very natural to suppose, that when the enemy were most pressing in their attack upon the devoted city; when the breach which was to give them entrance had been effected; and when, perhaps, the streets most distant from the Temple were already filled with Chaldean soldiery, a Council of his princes and nobles should have been held by Zedekiah in the Temple, to which they had fled for refuge, and that he should ask their advice as to the most feasible method of escape from the impending danger.

History, it is true, gives no account of any such assembly; but the written record of these important events which is now extant is very brief, and, as there is every reason to admit the probability of the occurrence, there does not appear to be any historical objection to the introduction of Zedekiah into the legend of the Super-Excellent Master's Degree, as having been present and holding a Council at the time of the siege.

By the advice of this Council, Zedekiah attempted to make his escape across the Jordan. But he and his attendants were, says Jeremiah, pursued by the Chaldean army, and overtaken in the plains of Jericho and carried before Nebuchadnezzar. His sons and his nobles were slain, and, his eyes being put out, he was bound in chains and carried captive to Babylon, where at a later period he died.

Masonic Reference for all Biblical Characters: "Biblical Characters in Freemasonry" John H. Van Cordon (1982) Masonic Book Club Lexington, Massachusetts