

MARK MASTER: MASTER OVERSEER

(SLEEVES ROLLED UP, HOLDING A SQUARE)

Brothers. To better control the work, King Solomon selected certain Fellow crafts who were well skilled in their work, as well as the Master Masons working on the Temple, and advanced them to the degree of Mark Master. I am one of the Master Masons. I was assigned duties of Master Overseer. My job was to inspect and accept or reject the work of the Mark Masters. What a couple of weeks we just went through!! First, there was some excitement when someone tried to obtain wages when he was not entitled to them. Then there was a lost piece of work, which threatened to delay all the work on the temple. And finally, there was a wage dispute among the workmen. But, King Solomon solved all the problems, and in the process, taught the craft valuable lessons in the values of honest employment and charity. Those fellowcrafts, as well as we MASTER MASONS, won't forget what happened for a long time. Well, I'd better be going Brothers. Have a good evening.

PAST MASTER:

(SUIT OR SPORT COAT, TOP HAT, CARRYING AGAVE)

Brothers. In the degree of Past Master, we leave the time of King Solomon and return to the present-day world. In the 18th century, when speculative Masonry was being developed, the Symbolic Lodges controlled the Degree of Royal Arch Mason. Only Past Masters could receive this degree. The thinking at that time was that the Royal Arch degree was so sublime and so important that only those well skilled in Speculative masonry could understand its lessons and fully appreciate them. Obviously, this greatly limited the number of brothers who could receive the valuable lessons of the Royal Arch, especially when Royal Arch Chapters were formed independently of the blue lodges. In England and Canada, the Past Master requirement was dropped. However, in the United States, we confer the degree of Virtual Past Master. This maintains tradition, while allowing all Master Masons the opportunity to continue to the Royal Arch. Obviously, this degree confers no honors or privileges outside of the Chapter and should in no way confuse Virtual Past Masters with actual Past Masters, those who served as Worshipful Masters of Symbolic Lodges. The lessons imparted in this degree deal with the responsibilities of those who would lead their brothers.

MOST EXCELLENT MASTER: HIGH PRIEST

(DRESSED IN HIGH PRIEST ROBES, INCLUDING MITER AND BREASTPLATE)

Brothers. We have returned to the time of King Solomon. I am the high priest of the Jewish people. I am dressed in my ceremonial robes because in the degree of most excellent master, I am to preside over the completion and the dedication of King Solomon's temple. Yes, we have finally completed it, and it is **magnificent!!** The last stone of the temple is to be cemented in its place, the aprons of the workmen will be taken off and laid aside, the holy vessels of the temple finally will be carried into the sanctum sanctorum and in a very impressive ceremony, the temple will be dedicated. I dare say that Jerusalem has never seen anything so ceremonial or splendid as what we have planned. After more than seven years of construction, the labors of the craftsmen are completed, and the **Most Excellent Master's** degree will be their reward. And finally, I will be able to walk from my quarters to the temple without having to detour around construction barriers!!

ROYAL ARCH: PRINCIPAL SOJOURNER

(SOJOURNER ROBES WITH STAFF)

Brothers, it has been 470 years since King Solomon's temple was completed and dedicated. But the temple stands no more. Because of disobedience to god's commands, the enemies of the Jewish nation were loosed upon them. Jerusalem was captured, the holy vessels were taken from the temple, the temple was destroyed, and the Jewish people were made captive and forcibly taken to Babylon. When the Persians conquered Babylon, the Jewish captives were released and allowed to return to their homeland to rebuild the city and the house of the lord. In the Royal Arch Degree, the candidates represent Sojourners, who under my guidance as Principal Sojourner, make the hazardous journey from Babylon to Jerusalem, and then volunteer their services to assist in the rebuilding of the temple on the site of the original temple of Solomon. During their labors, valuable discoveries are made, culminating in the recovery of the **Lost Master's Word**.

ROYAL MASTER'S DEGREE: HIRAM ABIF

(DRESSED IN ROBES)

Brothers. For those of you who do not recognize me, I am Hiram Abif. In the Royal Master's degree, we encounter a Fellowcraft who wonders if he will ever receive the secrets of a master mason. He engages me in a conversation, during which I attempt to ease his worries, as well as increase his knowledge, his patience, and his faith. However, the conversation with this young fellow craft makes me give some thought to his concerns and led directly to the creation and the activities of the Select Master's degree.

SELECT MASTER'S DEGREE: KING SOLOMON

(ROYAL ROBES, WITH A CROWN AND SCEPTER)

Brothers, it's good to see you here this evening. I know it's not often that you get to see King Solomon himself, up close and personal. And I hope you will shortly be qualified to receive the Select Master's degree. I, with my companions, Hiram King of Tyre and Hiram Abif, being in possession of the writing of Moses and the prophets, well knew that if the children of Israel deviate from the laws of God, their enemies will be set upon them, the cities and Temple sacked and destroyed, and the sacred treasures in the Sanctum Sanctorum forever lost. To prevent this evil, we agreed to erect a secret crypt or vault under the temple, in which to preserve some of our sacred treasures. We selected skilled workmen to construct this vault and made them Select masters. The ceremony of the degree dramatizes our efforts in preserving our sacred treasures for posterity. We hope you will be able to join us soon, as Select Masters.

SUPER EXCELLENT MASTER'S DEGREE: Prophet Ezekiel
(PROPHETS ROBE)

Greetings. My name is Ezekiel. Some call me a prophet, but I am not sure that is a proper term. I am more of a messenger from god. Things are not going well in our nation. As you know from descriptions in the holy bible, Solomon's kingdom split into two kingdoms, Israel and Judah. Israel was conquered and is no more. Now Judah is looking at the same fate. The people have sinned against god. Our king has proven to be without honor. And Nebuchadnezzar, the king of the Chaldeans, is approaching our borders with his vast army. The Super Excellent Master's Degree portrays what awaits us if the king and the nation do not repent. It is the most dramatic degree in all of masonry, requiring an extremely large cast. And its lessons are profound.

THE ORDER OF RED CROSS: ZERUBABEL

(ROYAL ROBES)

Brothers. I am Zerubbabel: a prince of Judah. I was in the first group of captives that was released from Babylon to return to Jerusalem, which you heard about in the description of the Royal Arch degree. Well, things are not going well. We have been interfered with and hindered in every manner conceivable. Since I was a boyhood friend of Darius, King of Persia, I have been commissioned by the Jewish High Council to return to Persia to ask King Darius for his assistance. When you become candidates for the Order of the Red Cross, you will make this journey with me. It will be hazardous, and our lives may be forfeit, but it is necessary. I think I have enough persuasiveness to convince King Darius that he should help us by giving us protection as well as monetary assistance. Let's hope so, or we will all be rotting away in a Persian Prison!!

THE ORDER OF MALTA: PRIOR
(PRIOR CAPE AND MANTLE, SWORD)

Brothers, we now leap forward to the 12th Century in the Christian era. Muslim invaders have taken over the Holy Land, and their marauders have made the sea-lanes in the Mediterranean Sea unsafe for travel. One of the orders that came into being during this time was the Knights of St John, also known as the hospitallers, for the hospital that they ran in Jerusalem. In 1118, the order organized a military arm to fight the enemies of Christianity. The fortunes, or rather misfortunes, of war caused the order to move its headquarters several times. They moved from Jerusalem to Acre, then to Cyprus, the Rhodes, and finally to Malta. The last move gave them the name by which they are known today, the Order of Malta. The ceremonies of this Order explain the history of the order, and will constitute you a Knight of Malta, sworn to protect travelers to the Holy Land, give them shelter, and when necessary, to wield your sword in their defense.

THE ORDER OF THE TEMPLE: COMMANDER

(FULL KNIGHT TEMPLAR UNIFORM, WITH CHAPEAU AND SWORD)

Brothers, I am a Knight of the Order of the Poor Fellow Soldiers of Christ and of the Temple of Solomon, better known as a Knight Templar. The Knights Templar was formed in 1118, to protect pilgrims traveling to the Holy Land. The Knights Templar and the Knights of Malta were formed at approximately the same time and had their headquarters in Jerusalem. In many battles with the Muslim forces, we Templars were on the right of the Christian battle line, and the Knights of Malta were on the left. We Templars had a reputation as fierce warriors, never asking or giving quarter, and at the same time protecting innocent maidens, helpless orphans, and the Christian religion. As a result, our reputation has spread far and wide, and attracts many noble your knights who desired to enlist in our cause. Should you become a candidate for the Order of the Temple, you will symbolically undergo the trials incident to the acceptance of a new Knight into our Order. The ceremonies are striking and impressive, ceremonies that I am sure you will keep in your memory always. I look forward to dubbing and creating you a Knights Templar.