

The York Rite of Freemasonry

Eldon L. Brooks

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(Condensed Version)

My Masonic Light

As a profane I petitioned the Symbolic Lodge and was investigated and elected to receive the degrees. I began a journey as an Entered Apprentice on the ground floor or checkered pavement, I learned about the outer courts of the Temple, the white lambskin apron and taught its sublime emblem, learned about the massive pillars, the furniture, the ornaments, the jewels, and the three great lights. No one explained to me or even hinted to me what I was about to receive. Never at any time was I told that I would be neither naked or clothed, hoodwinked, received upon a sharp instrument, caused to kneel for prayer or kneel at an altar, or divested of all metallic substances. I was not told that many, many hours would be required of me to learn the proficiency.

After the degree I would return to my place of abode and tell my wife that I would be spending many hours with an instructor and not with her. That I could not tell her what went on in the lodge room. The lodge and the things that occurred there were a secret! I must remain silent and could not answer any questions.

In the Fellowcraft degree I ascended a winding stairway and learned the lessons of the stair case. I entered the middle chamber and learned about the liberal arts and sciences. I learned the wages of a Fellowcraft. I was taught to revere the Sabbath day and keep it holy. On my journey to become a Master Mason I was led to that sublime place by visiting the unfinished sanctum sanctorum and there witnessed an example of firmness and fortitude never surpassed in the history of man. I became part of an allegory representing old age, death, the resurrection of the body, and the immortality of the human soul. I was raised a Master Mason and not a greater honor would be bestowed upon me. No greater honor would come to me than that of being a Master Mason.

In spite of being in darkness my brethren did well in teaching me and encouraging me to join in the work of the Symbolic Lodge. I learned enthusiastically, sometimes quickly and sometimes slowly, but I learned.

I was asked by my brethren to petition the Chapter, Council, and Commandery. I was not pressured at any time to petition, nor was I pushed or rushed. These same brethren also asked me to join the Scottish Rite. Again I was not pressured or rushed. My brethren only informed me to please take the York Rite before the Scottish Rite so that I might understand the Scottish Rite Degrees better if and when I petitioned.

Let me say at this point, I am sure without a doubt, that if some men had told their wives that they were about to take more degrees in Masonry the fight would have been on!!!!

When my brethren talked of the other degrees in Masonry they were ever so gently nudging me by creating curiosity in my mind.

One question that was proposed to me was in the Symbolic Lodge closing the Senior Warden says "to pay the craft their wages if ought be due them". What are those wages? How did the craft receive their wages? Do not confuse the wages of a Fellowcraft which are corn, wine and oil for the construction of the Temple with the wages of the craft in the closing of the lodge.

Another question brought to my attention was that I was told in the Master Masons Degree that I had a rough and rugged road to travel over, a journey in which life might be lost. What journey? Did you take a journey?

Did you receive the Masters word in the Masters Degree? No, but you did receive a word to serve until future generations found out the right. How could we have lost the most important word? Where was it to be found? Where must I look?

My brethren asked if I ever received my penny. What penny? They asked if I knew the meaning of the mallet and chisel, the meaning of the Jewish Half Shekel of Silver, the meaning of the arch, the keystone, the ark of the covenant, the crown and gavel of authority, Aaron's rod, the pot of manna, and many, many other objects to numerous to name.

The York or American Rite as they are called outside the United States of America consist of the Entered Apprentice, Fellowcraft, Master masons, Mark Master, Past Master, Most Excellent Masters, Royal Arch, Royal Master, select Masters, Super Excellent Masters, Order of the Red Cross, Order of Malta, and Order of the Temple. Most lodges in America are York Rite Lodges.

I petitioned for the degrees of the York Rite, and have not been disappointed. I have truly been enlightened by the work I received.

The Chapter Degrees consist of the Mark Master, Past Master, Most Excellent Master, and Royal Arch. These degrees are called the Capitular Degrees, or the Capstone or Keystone Degrees. The Keystone is that which binds the Arch together or keeps the arch from falling or holds the building together. These degrees are called the degrees of discovery, the discovery of the word.

In the Mark Masters Degree we go back in time as craftsmen working to complete the Temple. We work as Fellowcrafts and learn the lessons of fidelity, of keeping our word to another person. We are taught the wages of a Mark Master and how to receive them. You are taught a lesson directly from the Holy Bible.

In the Past Masters Degree you learn how and why the Worshipful Master rules and governs his lodge. You receive a lesson of untold value in ruling and governing the lodge and other people. This degree originated in England and was given to every Master elect of the lodge before he could be installed as Master of the Lodge. In English Masonry at that time only Masters Elect or Past Masters of a lodge could receive the Royal Arch Degree.

The Most Excellent Masters Degree takes place at the completion of King Solomon's Temple and its dedication to Almighty God. This degree like that of the Fellowcraft degree is some times misunderstood. If you were ever present when your church completed a new sanctuary and held its first service there to dedicate the building to the service of the one True and Living God, then you may understand the meaning of the Most Excellent Masters Degree. It is a time of great joy, rejoicing, and celebration. This is the only degree in Masonry where you are present at the completion and dedication of the Temple to the One and True Living God.

The Royal Arch Degree takes place after the destruction of King Solomon' Temple. God had allowed the temple to be destroyed because the people refused to follow his word and obey his prophets. The people were taken into captivity for a period of seventy years. You will now take that rough and rugged journey to return to Jerusalem to assist in the rebuilding of the Temple. You will be one of the craftsmen who helps to recover the lost word. A word which you knew all along but now becomes dear to you forever. Here you have finally received the word!!!

The Council Degrees are the Royal Master, Select Master, and the Super Excellent Master and are called the degrees of preservation or the Cryptic Degrees. These degrees preserved the word so that it could be found in the Royal Arch Degree. In the Council Degrees you learn about another part of King Solomon's Temple.

The Royal Masters Degree takes place between the first and second sections of the Master Mason's Degree. You represent a craftsman in search of the word by trying to impress Hiram Abiff with your skill and ability in making a beautiful piece of work to be placed in the sanctum sanctorum. Hiram Abiff takes the work and then leads you around the room and teaches you the lessons of life and death in word beyond belief. Hiram Abiff tells you where the word will be placed if he dies before the Temple is completed.

The Select Masters degree takes place in the secret vault of the Temple. During this degree Hiram Abiff is alive for part of the degree but is dead before the degree is over. The secret vault is another part of the temple you do not know about. You as a bosom friend of King Solomon stumble into that part of the Temple and find work going on in which you don't know about. You receive a beautiful lesson of justice and mercy and learned how the sacred volume of God was saved from the destructive rage of the enemies of truth and finally restored to the distressed Israelites. You learned how the word was preserved to be found in the Royal Arch.

The Super Excellent Degree is the 3rd degree in the Council and is an honorary Degree. It is conferred several times during the year in Dallas, Houston, and San Antonio. It covers part of the 70 years you were in captivity in the Royal Arch Degree This degree teaches a lesson in moral truth and fidelity.

The degrees of the Chapter and Council are Jewish history and many of my Jewish Brethren are members. Many have been officers of Chapters and Councils and Grand Officers. They tell me that their Jewish heritage comes alive in these degrees.

In a Commandery of Knights Templar you receive three degrees or orders which are the Order of the Red Cross, The Mediterranean Pass and Order of Malta, and the Order of the Temple. These Orders require that you have a Christian belief in Jesus Christ.

In the Order of Red Cross you are Zerubabel, Crown Prince of the House of Judah. You are a Mason and wanting to return to rebuild the City and Temple. You are taken captive and carried before King Darius who recognizes you as his friend and companion of his youth. You are released and sit at a banquet scene where you enter into a discussion of which is the greatest, the power of wine, the power of the King, or the power of women. You, as Zerubabel, disagree with all three and after stating your position, are made a member of the Order of the Red Cross.

In the Order of Malta and Mediterranean Pass you are present with St. Paul as he warmed his hands in the fire and a viper came out of the fire and fastened upon his right hand. You heard the eight beatitudes read to you in an impressive manner. You trace the history of the Knights Templar from their inception to the burning on the cross of Jacque DeMolay by the King of France and the Pope for his fidelity of not revealing the secrets of the Knights Templar.

The Order of the Temple is the crowning glory of the degrees and orders in Christian Masonry. After journeying as a poor and weary Pilgrim and as a Pilgrim Warrior, you take upon yourself an obligation to give alms to the poor, feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and bind up the wounds of the afflicted. You agree to wage war against the enemies of innocent maidens, destitute widows, helpless orphans, and the Christian religion. You are present at the Lord's supper, the death of Jesus Christ and his resurrection and ascension into heaven. This is the only degree or order where you might drink from the cup of the dregs of misery. This Order will bring home to the Christian Mason the true meaning of his Christian Knighthood.

My Brethren and Companions remember that in the Symbolic Degrees the Word was lost, in the Chapter or Capitular Degrees the Word was found, in the Council or Cryptic Degrees the word was preserved and in the Commandery Orders the Word was made flesh and was alive.

Please let me close by saying that every part of Masonry has a meaning to me. The Symbolic Degrees of the lodge remind me of my responsibility to my fellow man, my family, and my God. The Capitular Degrees remind me of my duty to God. The Cryptic Degrees remind me of my word to God. The Commandery of Knights Templar Degrees remind me of my duty to Jesus Christ and my church. The Scottish Rite degrees remind me that I am in a room and that the floor, ceiling, and walls are mirrors and that all and everything I do or say reflects back upon me in life.

Thank you for your attention.