

## Why a Royal and Select Master?

It is a peculiarity of the York Rite, whether intended or not by its authors, that the movement of the degrees is often historically reversed; so that as we apparently go forward in regular progression, the knowledge and light gained reflect backward upon the path we have traveled before, and degrees that seemed complete when we took them are found to require the explanation of the subsequent degrees before they can be fully understood. This is especially true of the Cryptic degrees, two of which historically precede the Royal Arch Mason degree, but which hold in reserve their valuable teachings until the candidate is ready to receive them with the most impressive effect. The term Cryptic Masonry stems from the fact that a central feature of the Royal and Select degrees is an underground chamber or vault.

### **Royal Master Degree**

This degree symbolizes a Fellowcraft in search of further light. Hiram Abif is still alive and imparts to the candidate the sublime teachings of useful labor on Earth and a worthy end of life. The tragedy of his untimely death is again brought forward, with the great loss suffered by the Craft. The efforts of the candidate are eventually rewarded, and he is admitted into a secret fellowship that has been entrusted with the secrets not yet available to the majority of the Craft. This is one of the most beautiful degrees in all Masonry, with lessons so impressive that they are never forgotten.

### **Select Master Degree**

When the Temple of Solomon was completed, a number of the secrets of the Craft had been lost. The craftsmen were advised that future generations may rediscover them if they properly applied themselves with fervency and zeal. The Select masters degree reveals how these secrets had been preserved for subsequent rediscovery. The degree dramatizes an incident which occurred during the building of the Temple. It is closely connected with the Royal Arch Mason degree, and in fact affords the explanation needed for its perfect understanding. Our three ancient Grand Masters appear in charge of a very important work connected with the Temple. The candidate, who represents one of King Solomon's most particular friends, is promoted to the work, in which only a limited number are employed. The information imparted to the candidate makes clear to him the preceding degrees.

## **Super Excellent Master Degree**

This degree has no connection either in history or symbolism with the Royal and Select Master degrees. It refers to circumstances that occurred during the siege of Jerusalem by Nebuzaradan, commander of the army of Babylon, and the ceremonies are intended to represent the final destruction of King Solomon's Temple and the carrying away of the captive Jews to Babylon. King Zedekiah of Judah listens to his false counselors and despises the warnings of the Prophet Jeremiah to heed his fealty to Babylon. Jerusalem is captured and its traitorous King is taken before King Nebuchadnezzar, who visits horrendous punishment upon him and his sons before utterly reducing the city and its Temple to rubble. The Super Excellent Master degree is one of the most dramatic and impressive in all of Free masonry and is especially significant in that it is the only degree based directly upon the destruction of the Temple. In full form, it requires a large, well rehearsed cast, and every Cryptic Mason should avail himself of an opportunity to witness the degree in full form, even if he has already received it in abbreviated form.