

Grand York Rite of Mississippi



GRAND COUNCIL
ROYAL AND SELECT MASTERS
OF MISSISSIPPI

AN INTRO TO THE CRYPTIC DEGREES

What are the Cryptic degrees?

Degrees are similar to one-act plays, in which you, as the candidate, play a key part by your attendance with a heartfelt desire to obtain more Light in Masonry. These degrees teach very beautiful lessons using a system of symbols and allegories. There is never any hazing or poor taste in the degrees. They are majestic, and the cast members work hard to exemplify the degrees for the best experience. The Cryptic Rite consists of three degrees: the Royal Master Degree, the Select Master Degree, and the Super Excellent Master Degree. The first two are mandatory degrees in Mississippi, and the third is an honorary one that is typically offered once a year on the third Saturday in January in South Mississippi. You will be entitled to this degree by virtue of being a member in good standing of a Council.

Where do the Cryptic degrees fit chronologically?

Whether intended or not, peculiar to the York Rite, the movement of the degrees is occasionally historically reversed so that we go forward in regular progression by going backward chronologically. In this way, the knowledge and light gained going forward always reflects backward upon the path we have traveled. Degrees that seemed complete when received are found to require the explanation of subsequent degrees to be understood. This is part of what makes York Rite degrees of infinite interest and causes the reflective Mason to continually study the sublime precepts and ceremonies. This is especially true of the Cryptic degrees, two of which historically precede the Royal Arch but hold in reserve their valuable teachings until the candidate is ready to receive them with a most impressive effect. Dr. Albert Mackey states in his 1897 Manual of the Council that the events recorded in the Royal Master Degree must have occurred at the time of the building of the first temple, during the brief period of time after the death of the Builder, between the discovery of his body and its Masonic interment. The Select Masters covers a period of time before the death of the Builder, prior to the events of the Royal Master Degree. Dr. Mackey states that the explanation for this reversed order is that it is supposed that the Royal Master Degree was publicly conferred and not concealed, leading to its discovery before the Select Master, which was not discovered until the building of the Temple of Zerubbabel.

What lessons are taught in the Royal Master?

In this degree, Hiram Abif is alive and speaks, imparting to the candidate the sublime teachings of useful labor on earth on earth and a worthy end of life. The tragedy of his untimely death is again brought forth with the great loss suffered by the craft. This is a beautiful degree that is especially illustrative of the third and seventh degrees. Dr. Albert Mackey described the ceremonies of this degree in his 1897 Manual of the Council as

...very brief and simple – briefer and simpler, indeed, than those of any of the preceding degrees. Symbolically, however, they present one great idea-the truly masonic one-of the laborer seeking for his reward...Divine Truth-the knowledge of God-concealed in the old Cabalistic doctrine, under the symbol of ... and typified in the masonic system, under mystical expression of the True [****], is the reward proposed to every mason who has faithfully wrought his task. It is, in short, the “Master’s wages.”

What lessons are taught in the Select Master?

This degree dramatizes an incident during the building of the temple. It is closely connected with the Royal Arch and affords the explanation needed for its perfect understanding. The place of meeting represents a “Secret Vault” or crypt beneath the temple. Our Ancient Grand Masters appear in charge of a very important work connected with the Temple. One of King Solomon’s most particular friends is promoted to the work, in which only a limited number are employed. The historical object of the degree is to commemorate the deposits of an important secret or treasure, which make clear to him the preceding degrees. The virtues brought forth by this degree are secrecy and silence, not uncommon to other degrees. When Aristotle was asked what thing appeared to him to be most difficult of performance, he replied, “to be secret and silent.” Secrecy and silence are common among the ancient mysteries, as Calcott says of old Egyptians, Apuleius of the mysteries of Isis, and Pythagoras to his disciples. Select masters, therefore, work in secrecy and silence, that they may prepare and preserve the sacred deposits of truth until the time shall come for its full revelation.

What lessons are taught in the Super-Excellent Master?

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 King of Babylon. The ceremonies are intended to represent the final destruction of the temple and the carrying away of captive Jews to Babylon as exemplified in the Royal Arch degree. The Super-Excellent Master degree is divided into three striking scenes. The first scene represents the Jewish captives at Babylon under the direction of Haggai, the Prophet. In the second scene, King Zedekiah of Judah listens to his false counselors and despises the warnings of the Prophet Jeremiah, and the vengeance of the Lorde is poured upon him. Last, Jerusalem is captured and its wicked King is taken with his sons before King Nebuchadnezzar, who causes the sons to be put to death before their father’s face. This degree portrays the fatal effects that follow violation of sacred obligations.

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