

Master Mason Degree

FOREWORD

This booklet has been prepared as one of a series of four to provide the new Mason with a greater insight into the degrees and to encourage him to seek additional Masonic Light. It is intended for a general non-technical explanation of the Master Mason Degree.

Prepared by the Grand Lodge of Alabama through the Committee on Masonic Education for the use of the Subordinate Lodges and their members.

THE MASTER MASON DEGREE

Ecclesiastes XII "Remember now thy' Creator in the days of thy youth-----".

Now that you have received the first three Degrees of Freemasonry you have undoubtedly felt for yourself something of the unique fascination that Masonry has for its members. Whence comes this power which should bind a man to Masonry forever?

Is it because of its close association with religion, a belief in Deity, a hope for immortality? Partly, because each of us believes in the existence of the Supreme Architect of the Universe, reveres the teachings of religion, and cherishes the hope of a life after death.

Is it its secrecy? Partly, because sharing secrets passed down from generation to generation gives one a feeling of being a member of a closely knit group which has mutual knowledge not shared by outsiders

Is it the antiquity of the Institution? Partly, because each of us instinctively respects that which has passed down through time and has proved its worth by surviving without basic change.

Is it the fact that Freemasonry, like music and mathematics, is a universal language which is understood everywhere and which unites men of every country, sect, and opinion? Partly, because it is a stirring thought that you as a Mason are in harmony with the beliefs and aspirations of your Brethren in all parts of the world.

The fascination of Masonry comes from all of these, and more. Each part makes its own contribution to the total, and yet Masonry is far greater than the sum of all its parts. You know something of this, even now. Later when you learn more about Masonry through experience and study, you will feel this bond even more strongly.

As a Master Mason you now know why this degree is referred to as "sublime". The deeply moving allegory in which you took a principal part is one of the simplest stories ever recorded by man, and yet it is completely inexhaustible in its profound teachings. It seems almost magical in its ability to seize upon the emotions and thus make doubly impressive the drama of life, death, and immortality which it unfolds. No man who receives the Master Mason Degree should ever forget it.

Yet this degree, like the two which preceded it, presents its many lessons rapidly and at times almost casually, as if in passing. For the scope of Freemasonry is so great that the teachings of each degree could not be fully expounded or comprehended in many, many evenings. In fact, a number of Masonic authorities have devoted much of their adult lives to the study of Masonry-and have felt that such a lifetime afforded them only a beginning in their work.

You might logically ask, "If Masonry is so complex, how can I possibly acquire enough knowledge of it to appreciate it or to understand it"?

It is true that Masonry is exceedingly complex when looked at through the eyes" of the Masonic student. It seems to stretch away on all sides like a vast and unknown continent. As each path is explored it leads to a new vista which previously had been seen only dimly or not at all-and beyond it lies another and another and another.

But in its more obvious aspects Masonry is not this complicated. It has certain messages to impart, and they can be perceived and understood by anyone who will seek them. Let us look, then in this light at the Master Mason Degree. While in the limited space of this booklet, as in those which you have already received, only a few points can be touched on, it is the sincere hope of this committee that you will feel the desire to delve far more deeply into them on your own, and of course with the willing help of your instructor.

Your introduction to the solemn and somber beauty of this degree began immediately after you entered the Lodge: "Remember now thy Creator *in* the days of thy youth---". The stately words and measured cadence of the 12th Chapter of Ecclesiastes form a perfect prelude to all that follows *in* the Master Mason Degree. But just what *is* the *meaning* of the golden bowl, the silver cord, the almond tree, and the other figures of speech with which this Biblical passage is so replete?

The commonly accepted version is that the text refers to an aged man who feels the breaking down of the body and the approach of death-one who would warn others to "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth-". The golden bowl is said to mean the Skull; the keepers of the house, the hands; the silver cord, the spinal cord; the grinders, the teeth; the almond tree, the white hair of age.

Another and more poetic interpretation IS that the verses refer to the coming of an unexpected and violent thunderstorm to a Palestinian village. "The grinders shall cease"; the women, fearful of the approaching storm, stop grinding meal on their little mills; "The keepers of the house shall tremble"; the guards of the houses of the well-to-do, unable to leave their posts and seek shelter, shudder at the wrath of the tempest; "the almond tree shall flourish"; the rising wind tosses the white blossoms of the almond tree against the dark sky.

Whatever the correct interpretation, the majesty and stateliness of the words immediately set the scene for the Master Mason Degree. The poignant "Remember now thy Creator----" tells all who hear it to seek the Great Architect of the Universe at every period of life, for only in Him is found that safety and lasting refuge from all harm to the body or to the spirit-which inevitably returns "to God, who gave it."

The Legend is the focal point around which the entire degree centers. While this particular story *is* found in Speculative

Masonry alone, it has its counterparts in some form or another in the legends and folklore of practically all peoples of the world.

There are some who believe that the Legend has been passed down in successive steps from time immemorial. There *is* no evidence to prove that this is so. Most authorities agree that the Legend was the invention of those active in Speculative Masonry its very early days, and who may have based it in part on some of the Ancient Mysteries of old.

Space here will not permit examining each of the many symbols in the Master Mason Degree. The meanings of the trowel, the three steps, the pot of incense, the bee-hive, the book of constitutions guarded by the Tiler's sword, the sword pointing to the naked heart, the anchor and ark, the 47th problem of Euclid, the hour-glass, the scythe, the setting maul, spade, coffin, and the sprig of acacia have or will be explained at a later date. The moments you spend in contemplation of these inspiring symbols will reward you richly by a deeper and better understanding of your relationship to God and your fellowman.

Now that you are a Master Mason you have greater rights and privileges, and also greater responsibilities.

In the preceding booklets you noticed references to Masonic law and Masonic trials. Fortunately trials are relatively rare, since the vast majority of Masons govern themselves by the many teachings of our Order. Among these, we point out only two, for example; Prudence- "Which teaches us to regulate our lives and actions agreeably to the dictates of reason", and Truth-the divine attribute by the influence of which we endeavor to regulate our conduct. Many Masons of long standing have never seen a trial. As a Master Mason you should know what constitutes a Masonic offense, and how it is punished.

A Masonic offense is defined as "Any act unbecoming a good man and true".

Upon being brought to trial and found guilty, the offender may be punished in anyone of four ways: by reprimand; by definite suspension; by indefinite suspension; or by expulsion. One so convicted has the right of appeal to the Grand Lodge, whose decision *in* all cases is final.

A Mason is obliged to abide by the Constitution, laws, and edicts of the Grand Lodge of his jurisdiction, and by the By-laws of his particular Lodge. A Mason is subject to the laws of the jurisdiction in which he may be at the moment, and also the laws of his home jurisdiction. For instance, an Alabama Mason who commits a Masonic offense while in California may be held responsible by either or both jurisdictions.

Among your duties as a Master Mason are strict compliance with your obligation; loyalty to your Lodge and the Fraternity; to pay your dues promptly; obedience to the laws, written and unwritten of Freemasonry; and to be an active Mason if possible, by all means a member in good standing in a Lodge.

Among your many rights and privileges are these: The privilege of visiting other Lodges; the privilege of being avouched for; the right to ask for Masonic relief; the privilege of transferring, demitting and affiliating with a different Lodge; the right to trial by your peers should you transgress the laws of Masonry; the right of Masonic burial; the right to appear in public Masonic processions; the right to display the Masonic emblem; the right to join in the discussion in your Lodge, to vote, and to hold office; the right and privilege of giving Masonic service; the right to be taught all that the three degrees of Masonry include and to enjoy all the privileges it offers to the spirit, mind, and heart.

You may now be called on to serve on an Investigating Committee. Our first duty is to guard well our door. If you serve with older and more experienced brethren don't hesitate to check with them and call on their experience.

Here are some important pointers in conducting an investigation: Be on guard against a tendency to carelessness.

Don't overlook any references-the last one may be the one needed.

Masonry owes an applicant nothing.

If there is a doubt, Masonry and the Lodge should be given the benefit of it.

Discover whether the applicant will strengthen the Fraternity. It is not enough that "he is as good as some other" Masons. It is often better to lose one than to gain one who adds nothing.

The applicant's family, his neighbors, his fellow workers, and his employers, usually know him best.

Ask yourself if the applicant would be accepted as an intimate in the homes of your members.

Make final decision objectively-based upon facts- Don't allow your judgment to be swayed by sentiment or emotion.

Investigations should be so conducted that, even if rejected, the applicant gains higher respect for the Fraternity.

The use of Credit Reports, especially in the lodges of the larger communities, furnishes information which is often revealing and supplies a highly valuable adjunct to the investigation that is almost indispensable. If used, especial care must be taken to hold the information strictly confidential.

When you have finished your investigation, it is your Masonic Duty to sign the report. Not to report on the petition you have been assigned to is not only discourteous but borders on a Masonic Offense.

You are now on the threshold of a great deal of activity. You should aspire to many things and among them advancing through the several places and stations in the Lodge. Your chance of appointment to any of the appointive offices will be greatly enhanced by the proficiency of your work and your faithful attendance and participation.

You are now entitled to all the light that can be communicated to you in symbolic Masonry, this is not only an honor, but it IS a real challenge now for you to become proficient in this Degree. Very little effort will be required of you to be able to visit other Lodges in this and other jurisdictions. You are urged in the strongest manner to attend your Lodge regularly, as well as other Lodges when it is convenient for you to do so. This will enable you to learn some portions of the work, but in addition to this it is always desirable to communicate with a well informed instructor. It will also help if you desire to instruct a candidate.

You are entitled to have a copy of the Grand Lodge Constitution and Edicts obtainable from the Secretary. You should obtain a copy of the Lodge By-Laws. Read and become familiar with them. You may become familiar with the written work of the Order by obtaining the Masonic Ritual of Alabama also obtainable from the Secretary.

It is also your privilege to recommend a man for Masonry, but once more you are cautioned not to recommend him unless you are satisfied that he will conform to the principles of our Order and be a credit to the Craft.

Read again the Master Mason Charge: "Your zeal for the institution of Masonry the progress you have made in the mystery, and your conformity to our regulations have pointed you out as a proper object of our favor and esteem. You are now bound by duty, honor and gratitude to be faithful to your trust; to support the dignity of your character on every occasion, and to enforce by precept and example, obedience to the tenets of the Order. In the character of a Master Mason, you are authorized to correct the errors and irregularities of your uniformed brethren, and to guard them against a breach of fidelity. To preserve the reputation of the fraternity unsullied, must be your constant care; and for this purpose it is your province to recommend to your inferiors obedience and submission; to your equals courtesy and affability, and to your superiors kindness and condescension. Universal benevolence you are always to inculcate, and by the regularity of your own behavior afford the best example for the conduct of others less informed. The ancient landmarks of the Order, intrusted to your care, you are carefully to preserve, and never suffer them to be infringed, or countenance a deviation from the established usages and customs of the fraternity.

Your virtue, honor and reputation are concerned in supporting with dignity the character you now bear. Let no motive, therefore, make you swerve from your duty, violate your vows or betray your trust: but be true and faithful, and imitate the example of that celebrated artist whom you this evening represent. Thus you will render yourself deserving of the honor which we have conferred and merit the confidence that we have reposed".

In conclusion, it is urged that you learn more through study about this great Fraternity of which you are now a member.

You are now a Master Mason and have arrived at the portals of your Masonic life. You have been given a foundation upon which to erect your spiritual, moral and Masonic edifice. You, and only you, can build upon this foundation. The application of your God-given faculties to a search after more Light will result in your arriving at the end of life's road with the happy reflection consequent on a well-spent life.

SEE YOU AT LODGE

SCRIPTURE VERSES OF INTEREST

Ecclesiastes	12:1-7
Matthew	18:15-17
Nehemiah	4:10
Job	14: 1-2
Isaiah	2:21
2 Corinthians	16:9
Luke	20:27-38
Revelations	22:1-27