SUPER EXCELLENT MASTER DEGREES

--- HISTORICAL ---

The Super Excellent Master Degree is the last of the Cryptic degrees and it is an optional degree. Unlike the first two degrees the Super Excellent Master (SEM) is not set within the Secret Vault. It has traditionally been given as an honorary degree. The Candidates are introduced into the mysteries of the Super Excellent Master. Many believe that it is an enlargement of the Royal Arch Degree, which refers to the destruction of King Solomon’s Temple. In order of the degrees the SEM takes place between the Most Excellent Master and the Royal Arch. The Super Excellent Master is exclusively focused on the lead up to destruction of the Temple.

The SEM is believed by some scholars to be of purely American origin, but others believe that it came to us like the other Cryptic degrees as a detached or honorary degree conducted by the early Inspector General of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite. The earliest records show that St. Andrews Chapter in Boston conferred a degree by that name in the latter part of the eighteenth century. The written records of Columbian Council of Royal Masters in New York show that a Lodge of Super Excellent Masters was organized on December 2, 1817 as part of their Cryptic Council.

The Super Excellent Master Degree doesn’t quite fit within the degrees of the Cryptic Council so it has been, and to some extent remains a controversial degree. It is conferred as a regular part of some jurisdictions (Minnesota for one), but other jurisdictions confer it only as an honorary degree. Be that as it may, the SEM degree relates events that lead to the recovery of the lost Word and it covers that period in history that surrounds the destruction of the first Temple. As such it fills a gap that otherwise would be lost the Masonic story. It is a beautiful and impressive degree that conveys an import Masonic message, one that needs to be part of our repertoire even if it doesn’t fit conveniently into our system.

--- SYMBOLS ---

The symbols of the Super Excellent Master Degree are the Circle, Triangle, Square and the perfect ashlar.

**The circle** is emblematic of friendship and the unending chain of fraternal union. It eludes to wholeness, perfection, infinity, eternity, timelessness, the cycle of life, heaven, and the omnipresent Deity. Emblematic of friendship, it reminds us of our moral duty to our fellow man. It is a symbol of eternity and immorality, having not a beginning nor an end. In this way it also eluded to God, without a beginning or an end. It is also a symbol of wholesomeness, perfection, timelessness, the cycle of life, and the omnipresent of God.

The circle also represents an individual as a single link of a chain. At the closing of this degree the companions form a circle around the altar. Thus the individual links are joined forming a chain of friendship, a union of brotherhood.

**The equilateral triangle** is symbolic of the three attributes of the Deity, omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient. God’s universal power, universal knowledge, universal presence. For Christians it is symbolic of the Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Yod within the triangle represents the Tetragrammaton, the sacred name of God.

**The four sided Square** represents stability, harmony, order, and a firm foundation. It has many allusions in freemasonry. It symbolizes the four cardinal virtues which are imbedded in the soul of man ***temperance***, ***fortitude***, ***prudence***, and ***justice***. The earth with its four cardinal directions, and civilization, a regulated life, lived in harmony with others.

Putting them together they represent heaven and earth ruled by God.



**The Perfect Ashlar –** It is the stone that has been taken from the quarry in its rough state, it has been shaped and refined by the mason, it is now square and true, suitable for the builders use. Ready to be incorporated into the Temple.

--- LESSON OF THE DEGREE ---

The primary lessons of the Super Excellent Master degree is loyalty, faithfulness and fidelity to ones vows and obligations. It dramatically portrays the consequences that may result from failure to live out your obligations. At the same time it reminds us to choose our councilors and friends wisely. Unlike most Masonic degrees the message is very straightforward and clear. Each of the lessons is as applicable to our daily lives today as they were in the distant past.

The SEM is divided into four sections, the prologue and three scenes with the setting moving from the captives in Babylon to the Judean Royal Court, in the closing days of the siege of Jerusalem and the destruction of the city and the Temple, and finally to the court of King Nebuchadnezzar. The principal characters are Zedekiah, king of Judah, who came to the throne at age 21, has ruled for 11 years, and has done evil in the eyes of God; and Nebuchadnezzar, king of the Chaldeans from Babylon. King Nebuchadnezzar has sent Captain Nebuzaradan, commander of the Chaldean army to capture King Zedekiah and destroy Jerusalem.

Within the Jewish royal court of King Zedekiah of Judah, the King is being counseled by his wicked and self-serving councilors. Zedekiah is young, arrogant and foolish. He has already been conspiring with the ruler of Egypt to rebel against Nebuchadnezzar, his sworn lord.

The prophet Ezekiel was a contemporary of Jeremiah and was among those exiled to Babylon. Ezekiel prophesied the fall of Jerusalem and the rebuilding of the Temple. He was from a priestly line and his ministry encouraged the people to live according to God’s law while in exile.

The prophet Jeremiah was born into a priestly family, his father was a profit and a high priest. Jeremiah warned King Zedekiah that he must repent or the City of Jerusalem would be destroyed, the king would be captured, his sons slain, the people carried off to Babylon and the Shekinah would depart Israel forever. Jeremiah foretold King Zedekiah’s future and fate in the form of a riddle which the King chose to ignore

First section: the candidate assumes the obligation and is instructed in the signs, grips and word, as well as in the symbolism of the degree.

Second section: the candidate witnesses the desolation and sorrow of some Jewish captives in a grove in Babylon, who are subsequently given words of comfort by the prophet Ezekiel.

Third section: the court of King Zedekiah, where Zedekiah is being influenced by two evil councilors and refuses to hear the words of the prophet Jeremiah, who is urging Zedekiah to repent and return to God. Jeremiah poses a riddle to the King, who is then forced to flee. King Zedekiah and his court escapes through the gardens, but are later captured by Captain Nebuzaradan and the army of the Chaldeans.

Final section: Zedekiah is brought before Nebuchadnezzar at Riblah for judgment. Zedekiah learns the answer to Jeremiah’s riddle and is punished for his crimes.

**Points to Ponder**

* The virtues of the Super Excellent Master are that you should pledge yourself to faith, friendship and fidelity in all of your relationships.
* Your faith in which you worship your God.
* The friendship or love you have for your Masonic Brothers. Fidelity in which you pledge yourself to honor your obligations and the duty you owe to your brothers, family and community.
* The lesson for us to take away from Zedekiah is that he placed his love and trust in his material possessions when he should have had placed his trust in God.
* Our spiritual consciousness is necessary to our entire wellbeing and happiness.

A unique future of this degree is that at the close of this degree we form the circle of friendship. Standing shoulder to shoulder with arms crossed and hands clasped, we form the circle, a united chain of fraternal union and brotherly love, a true circle of friendship.