

The Supreme Grand Royal Arch Chapter of New Zealand



# THE CEREMONY OF EXALTATION

## THE ROYAL ARCH DEGREE

A Handbook for Royal Arch Companions  
Published by the Supreme Grand Royal Arch  
Chapter of New Zealand

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This handbook has been produced by The Supreme Grand Royal Arch Chapter of New Zealand to supplement the Ceremony of Exaltation, usually known as the Mark Master Mason Degree, as a guide to understanding the intent and importance of the degree.

The Grand Lodge of New Zealand recognises six degrees (Rule 71 of the Book of Constitution) the first three of which form the three degrees of Craft Masonry.

1. The Entered Apprentice, or First, Degree
2. The Fellowcraft, or Second, Degree
3. The Master Mason, or Third Degree

All business in the Lodge takes place in the Entered Apprentice (First) Degree and, therefore, a Candidate who has been admitted a Freemason is able to attend regular meetings. A Craft Lodge is governed by the Master and his two Wardens. A Lodge is part of a District, governed by a District Grand Master. A District is part of a Division, governed by a Divisional Grand Master. Free Masonry in New Zealand is governed by a Grand Master.

4. Mark Master Mason
5. Excellent Master
6. Royal Arch Mason

Unlike a Craft Lodge, however, the business of a Royal Arch Chapter takes place in the Royal Arch Degree and a candidate who has been Advanced to the Honourable Degree of Mark Master Mason, or has been Acknowledged as an Excellent Master, cannot attend in the Chapter until he has been Exalted to the Degree of the Royal Arch. Each Royal Arch Chapter is governed by a First Principal, assisted by a Second Principal and a Third Principal. Each Chapter is part of a District, governed by a Grand Superintendent. A District is part of a Division, overseen by a Grand Principal (Depute First Grand Principal, Second Grand Principal and Third Grand Principal). The Order is governed by a First Grand Principal.

Again, unlike a Craft Lodge, in which all ceremonies take place in the Lodge, the Mark Master Mason degree is conducted in a Lodge of Mark Master Masons, the Excellent Master Degree is conducted in a Lodge of Excellent Masters, but the Royal Arch Degree is conducted in a Chapter of Royal Arch Masons.

## PREFACE

The Holy Royal Arch, as worked in New Zealand, is the culmination of the Mark Degree (with which it has very little in common) and more especially the Excellent Master degree; continuing the historical story of the sojourners returning from Babylon to Jerusalem and detailing what they uncovered upon clearing away the debris of the ruins of King Solomon's Temple.

History of the Degree in New Zealand – the Supreme Grand Royal Arch Chapter (the Royal Arch's governing body) was formed in NZ in 1892 with the uniting of chapters from the English, Scottish and Irish constitutions – these bodies had been working the degree in the preceding 30 years.

It is of interest to note the kindly consideration of those responsible for forming the New Zealand Constitution when debating the structure to be adopted. Of the Constitutions then active in New Zealand they had a choice of the English form, which does not incorporate the Mark or Excellent Degrees; the Irish form, which incorporates the Mark Degree, but not the Excellent Degree; or the Scottish form, which incorporates all three degrees. After much discussion they decided to adopt the Scottish form because, then, it would not be necessary for Companions to pay another subscription to a Mark Lodge should they wish to extend their education in that direction. This pragmatic consideration for members' pockets has allowed us a comprehensive education in Royal Arch Masonry at the cost of a single subscription to a Chapter.

As indicated earlier the Book of Constitution of craft freemasonry in New Zealand recognises the three degrees of Royal Arch in addition to its own three degrees—suggesting Royal Arch Masonry to be the logical choice of an Order for the interested freemason to join in his quest for daily advancement in his Masonic knowledge.

## THE ROYAL ARCH DEGREE

The degree begins with the threefold opening—you may wish to reflect on this and ask yourself—why threefold? How does it relate to the lost word of the Master Mason?

After gaining entry with the password of the former degree you take another obligation, as is to be expected. The address immediately following the obligation sets the scene for the remainder of the evening's work. An indication of the work that is to be expected of you when you are instructed that: "it is by zeal and patient industry alone that true knowledge can be acquired".

The Passing of the Veils is your next step. You are in familiar territory because you were ceremonially informed when taking your Excellent Master degree that you would be required to prove yourself when, figuratively, you arrived at Jerusalem. This time, however, you are allowed to pass through the white Veil into the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin was the formal gathering of the princes and rulers in Jerusalem and here you complete your figurative journey from Babylon to Jerusalem. It is here the first sojourner says to Zerubbabel, the governor: “We deem the lowest service in the work of the Lord to be to us an honour, and therefore beg employment only”—humility personified—and it is in that posture of humility that you ought to carry out the rest of your task in the ceremony, as well as in daily life—humbly serving that which is bigger than the servant.

The degree becomes very hands-on, with you participating in three descents into the crypt. You find yourself amongst the ruins of King Solomon’s Temple and discover a crypt. With the removal of three stones of the Arch the light within the crypt becomes progressively lighter—indicating that this is a journey towards the light (what light you may wonder?). The first stone to be removed is the keystone and invites you to reflect upon the value of the keystone in maintaining the Arch and its integrity in the intervening years. In the Crypt you and your conductors uncover many things which later you discover to be of great value—the scroll of the VSL (representing the first five books of the Old Testament), the altar, with the three names on its side (indicating whose altar and crypt they have entered and, therefore, its importance to all Freemasons), the names of the Deity in gold on top, the signs of the zodiac, the names of the twelve tribes of Israel and the triangle, amongst others. It is worth taking a moment to reflect on the individual and collective importance of these discoveries.

This descent is repeated—this time in the presence of the knowledgeable Scribe Ezra—an officer of the Chapter whose importance is greater than that just of the secretary, representing, as he does, a significant figure of the Old Testament—indeed one who has a complete Book to himself.

In the investiture that follows you are advised that if you continue faithful and act with honour we will take care to instruct you in every branch of our mystical knowledge. This is illuminating indicating that your journey is not only mystical, philosophical and moral, but that is also far from complete.

In the Discovery charge which follows you are informed of the importance of Freemasonry the preservation of the VSL in the crypt of the Temple and reminding us of one of the early symbols we were introduced to when we were advised to lock up our secrets in our heart – far away from the “destroying flames and fury of the enemy”?. The Grand word of the Holy Royal Arch is communicated—and we are informed that its tripartite form instructs how to

pronounce, not only the Grand Word, but also the name of the Deity. This conclusively demonstrates how the “word” that was lost with the untimely death of our master Hiram Abiff were recovered. You may have thought, “If three men knew the word and one is killed surely the remaining two still knew it. How then was it lost?” You now learn that it is not just the word, but how it is pronounced in its tripartite form that is important! This is the climactic part of the ceremony of the degree of the Holy Royal Arch.

Remember also, there are two words on the altar, not just the tripartite Grand Word of the Order but also the Hebrew name for the Deity.

The “Ordinary Signs” are derived from the actions of the sojourners in the several descents into the crypt and it is important to note the difference between penal sign (where you use the right hand) and sign of salute (in which you use the left hand)—the right hand is holding the scroll of the VSL discovered on the second descent, symbolically represented by the Sign of Fidelity.

These signs are further illustrated—in which we are instructed on how to interact with respect to our Deity—“with outward form of contrition and humility”—reiterating the injunction given prior to setting out on the journey.

The presentation of the Working Tools is that of the real tools which you used on your journey—not just tools on which you theorise and moralise. These working tools if applied correctly ought to facilitate the “loosening the hold which long habits of sin and folly have had upon his disposition” (bearing in mind that to sin is simply to fall short) and “removing the rubbish of vice and ignorance which prevent him from beholding the eternal foundation of truth and wisdom upon which he is to erect the spiritual and moral temple”. This is the foundation of all Masonry.

Last we have the Final Charge—in which we reflect upon how we entered the world, approach the close of life, and are advised that we can rightfully hope for that “resurrection where the words of the woman of Tekoah are untrue (2 Samuel 14) when she declares that we are as water spilt upon the ground and cannot be gathered up”. We are told that “if you have seen only a series of unmeaning rites...then indeed, we have laboured in vain and you have spent your strength for naught.” If you have entered into the spirit of these solemn ceremonies ... “then, and only then, can you feel that friendship, that union, that zeal, that purity of heart” that the degree as a whole encapsulates.

## THE LESSONS OF THE DEGREE

While the Moral lessons are delivered as a part of the ritual the mystical lessons are alluded to but not spelt out.

You may wish to reflect on the following interpretations that can be made of the degree:

This degree is a lesson of threes—a number often thought of the “total”, being the sum of odd and even, masculine and feminine, etc. The number three is employed throughout the degree—there are three Principals; the three parts to the Grand Word; three parts to the name of the Deity; three sojourners, etc.

Li the three Principals we see that Zerubbabel may be taken to represent the Body, Haggai the Mind and Jeshua the Spirit.

The Royal Arch journey is a spiritual journey—a journey from the land of excess to the spiritual home after cleansing.

This representation is further illustrated by the journey of the sojourners: they are returning from the land of Babylon to Jerusalem. Babylon was a place of excess and of plenty, very much a place of the flesh and the material world. Jerusalem, however, is their spiritual home and this we see their journey as a spiritual quest.

This degree is also, perhaps, a degree of rebirth or new cycle in that we are entering into the place of the old temple in our quest to build a new spiritual temple—a new spiritual home.

An important theme of this degree is the clearing away of the debris in order to begin the rebuilding of the temple. Are we in effect clearing away the intellectual clutter of our minds in order to discover the altar within the crypt; the truth within our heart? In order to see the light we must first remove that which stops us from seeing.

It is indeed a degree of completion—a completion of the travel through the veils into the Sanhedrin—the completion of the Holy Royal Arch. On an even larger scale, the Royal Arch Degree is the culmination of the three degrees of Antient Freemasonry with the discovery of the genuine secrets that replace the substituted secrets of the Third Degree. Further to this it is the completion of the journey that began in the First Degree with the birth of the man. The Second Degree is the growth of that man. The Third Degree is the symbolic death of that man in the hope of a spiritual resurrection. In the Royal Arch Degree, armed with the genuine secrets of a Mason, that man is assured of that spiritual resurrection with the discovery that the three fold name of God. It is probably indicative of the Christian antecedents of Freemasonry implying the Trinity.

Thus the Royal Arch degree while being acceptable to any member of the three religions of the book, based as it is on the Old Testament stories, also has a peculiar Christian flavour; indeed earlier in the development of the degree the scroll that was discovered was that of John 1:1 (In the beginning was the Word and the word was with God and the Word was God) and not that of Genesis. This also reiterates for you the answer you gave when you were asked when you were first initiated – “In whom do you put your trust?”

### WHERE TO NOW?

The degree of the Holy Royal Arch constitutes in certain respects the end of the beginning and there are numerous opportunities for you to extend your researches into the “hidden mysteries”.

You could do no better than to read the following optional lectures that are in your ritual:

- The lecture on the Royal Arch Tracing Board
- The lecture on the Jewel
- The lecture on the Altar

You should register on the SGRACNZ Web Site (<http://www.royalarch.org.nz>) and look at the educational material available to registered users. In particular look at the writings of J D Anderson, A B Christensen, J P Glenie and the lectures of Phil Ivamy and Gary Kerkin.

Further reading options include excellent books by R A Wells and Bernard Jones “Freemasons Book of the Royal Arch”.

You might like to obtain a copy of the Transactions of the Research Chapter of New Zealand No 93 which are available on a CD. You can find the address of the Scribe of the Chapter on the Web Site. If you are interested in the history and symbology of the Royal Arch you will find this an invaluable resource.

Once you have begun to assimilate what the Royal Arch has to offer, there are a number of further degrees and Orders open to you, each of which requires Royal Arch membership:

- Red Cross of Babylon
- Ark Mariner (both of which are worked by some NZ Royal Arch Chapters)
- Cryptic degrees—which relate events around the building of the Secret Vault and the sacking of Jerusalem and which are undertaken in Cryptic Councils under the auspices of the SGRACNZ
- The Orders of the Knights Templar and the Knights Templar Priest which base their legends on the Knights Templar
- The Operatives which give an operative interpretation of the craft degrees
- The Red Cross of Constantine
- St Thomas of Acon
- Allied Masonic Degrees - a group of five unrelated degrees

