

Exodus 28

Moses is still on the mountain receiving the law and all the details that he needed to understand. We seem to be taking a small break in the instructions to build the Tabernacle furniture: the Bronze Laver and the Altar of Incense. These will be covered in Chapter 30.

This section is mostly concerned with a description of the high priest's ceremonial robes known as the **garments of glory and beauty**. The garments were also for consecration of Aaron and his sons so that they could “minister” to the LORD. Let’s look at both the garments and their construction and where necessary, the symbolic nature of the True High Priest.

(Exodus 28:1) "Now **take** Aaron your brother, and his sons with him, **from among the children** of Israel, that **he may minister to Me as priest**, Aaron *and* Aaron's sons: Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar.

The priesthood was created from the tribe of Levi. But, it was special in that priests could only come from the line of Aaron. In the next chapter, we read:

(Exodus 29:9) And you shall gird them with sashes, Aaron and his sons, and put the hats on them. The priesthood shall be theirs for a perpetual statute. So you shall consecrate Aaron and his sons.

Ministering to God centered around officiating the sacrifices and performing the duties required in the Holy Place and, for the High Priest only, the Most Holy Place. The Hebrew word for priest is “cohane” which means “mediator”. He was the designated agent between God and Man. This is one of 4 times that God says “minister to Me as priest”.

Before, there was just one High Priest and one or more priests who were his sons. Jesus is our High Priest and we are children of the Most High God therefore we are

... “chosen by God *and* precious, (5) you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, **a holy priesthood**, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” And we are “...a chosen generation, **a royal priesthood**, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; (10) who once *were* not a people but *are* now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy. 1 Peter 2:4-5; 1 Peter 2:9-10.

Christ is our High Priest, and we are His priesthood. We minister to God by ministering to the needs of others, especially their need for a Savior. We too intercede for them to the High Priest who intercedes for us to the Father.

(Exodus 28:2) And you shall make **holy garments** for Aaron your brother, **for glory and for beauty**.

One could think of this of glory and beauty of the High Priest, or, more so, for the glory and beauty of God. The garments were considered holy, not only in purity but also because they were set apart from ordinary and common clothing.

When people saw Aaron, they knew who he was because of what he wore.

(Exodus 28:3) So you shall speak to all *who are* gifted artisans, whom I have **filled with the spirit of wisdom**, that they may make Aaron's garments, to **consecrate (sanctify)** him, **that he may minister to Me as priest**.

The word consecrate here is actually the word used for sanctify. To sanctify means to pronounce or make someone or something clean, either ceremonially or morally. Of course, given our flesh, only God can pronounce someone as clean.

The artisans, those who worked with metals or those who could make clothing or various forms of cloth, were gifted in their own rights. But God filled them with the spirit of wisdom so that they could make these special garments as designed by God.

(Exodus 28:4) And these *are* the garments which they shall make: **a breastplate, an ephod, a robe, a skillfully woven tunic, a turban, and a sash**. So they shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother and his sons, that he may minister to Me as priest.

The LORD says that 6 things are to be made. There are actually more details and there's one additional item as well that will be described at the end of the chapter.

Most of the chapter is devoted to the High Priests garments but the other priests will also wear special clothing. We will read about these at the end of the chapter.

So, there will be a

1. A breastplate but not made of metal
2. An ephod which is like an apron
3. A long sleeveless robe
4. A full-body tunic
5. A cloth hat
6. A sash

The details of these items follows:

(Exodus 28:5) "They shall take the **gold, blue, purple, and scarlet thread**, and the **fine linen, (6)** and they shall make **the ephod** of gold, blue, purple, *and scarlet thread*, and fine woven linen, artistically worked. (7) It shall have two shoulder straps joined at its two edges, and *so* it shall be joined together. (8) And the **intricately woven band of the ephod**, which *is* on it, shall be of the same workmanship, *made of* **gold, blue, purple, and scarlet thread**, and fine woven linen.

When we described the Tabernacle, we learned that the colors do have some meaning but they are not clearly defined in the text. Most say that blue symbolizes the heavens; most say that purple represents royalty; most say that scarlet represents man or perhaps blood. Fine linen was white, which most say symbolizes purity. There's something about human nature that makes us want to assign meaning to things in the Bible.

Even though the ephod was made of fine linen as it's base, most believe that it was completely covered with colorful embroidery. The dyed threads were thought to be made from wool which had been cleaned, combed and combined into threads. The linen was made from flax and was bleached white through many iterations of washing and laying out in the sun. There was a lot of work involved!

The band, or sash, helped to keep the ephod secure on the priest's body.

(Exodus 28:9) "Then you shall take **two onyx stones** and engrave on them the names of the sons of Israel: (10) **six of their names on one stone and six names on the other stone, in order of their birth.** (11) With the work of an engraver in stone, *like* the engravings of a signet, you shall engrave the two stones with the names of the sons of Israel. You shall set them in settings of gold. (12) And you shall put the two stones on the shoulders of the ephod *as* memorial stones for the sons of Israel. **So Aaron shall bear their names before the LORD on his two shoulders as a memorial.** (13) You shall also make settings of gold, (14) and you shall make two chains of **pure gold** like braided cords, and fasten the braided chains to the settings.

The ephod had a front section and a back section. The two pieces were joined at the top by gold settings (KJV uses an archaic name: ouches). Into each of these settings was placed a large onyx stone. On each stone were the names of the tribes of Israel, 6 to a stone, most likely in birth order.

The stones were said to be a "memorial". This isn't for the dead, as we might think. These were to remind the High Priest that he carried the children of Israel on his shoulders, that is, he bore the responsibility of interceding for them before God.

It's nice when Scripture explains Scripture!

(Exodus 28:15) "**You shall make the breastplate of judgment.** Artistically woven according to the workmanship of the ephod you shall make it: **of gold, blue, purple, and scarlet thread, and fine woven linen,** you shall make it. (16) It shall be doubled into a square: a **span shall be** its length, and a span *shall be* its width. (17) **And you shall put settings of stones in it,** four rows of stones: *The first row shall be* a sardius, a topaz, and an emerald; *this shall be* the first row; (18) the second row *shall be* a turquoise, a sapphire, and a diamond; (19) the third row, a jacinth, an agate, and an amethyst; (20) and the fourth row, a beryl, an onyx, and a jasper. They shall be set in gold settings. (21) And the stones shall have the **names of the sons of Israel, twelve according to their names, like the engravings of a signet, each one with its own name; they shall be according to the twelve tribes.** (22) "You shall make chains for the breastplate at the end, like braided cords of pure gold. (23) And you shall make two rings of gold for the breastplate, and put the two rings on the two ends of the breastplate. (24) Then you shall put the two braided *chains* of gold in the two rings which are on the ends of the breastplate; (25) and the *other* two ends of the two braided *chains* you shall fasten to the two settings, **and put them on the shoulder straps of the ephod in the front.** (26) "You shall make two rings of gold, and put them on the two ends of the breastplate, on the edge of it, which is on the inner side of the ephod. (27) And two *other* rings of gold you shall make, and put them on the two shoulder straps, **underneath the ephod toward its front, right at the seam above the intricately woven band of the ephod.** (28) They shall bind the breastplate by means of its rings to the rings of the ephod, using a blue cord, so that it is above the intricately woven band of the ephod, and so that the breastplate does not come loose from the ephod. (29) "**So Aaron shall bear the names of the sons of Israel on the breastplate of judgment over his heart, when he goes into the holy place, as a memorial before the LORD continually.** (30) And you shall put in the breastplate of judgment **the Urim and the Thummim,** and they shall be over Aaron's heart when he goes in before the LORD. So Aaron shall bear the judgment of the children of Israel over his heart before the LORD continually.

The breastplate was actually a woven piece of linen that was twice as long as it was wide. This rectangle was folded over to make a square pouch. Most believe it was closed on three sides

an the open side was used to put in and take out two special stones. The breastplate was actually set within a square section of the ephod. It was secured by chains of gold and gold rings that were attached to the onyx stone gold settings. Evidently, two blue cords of thread were also used to securely set the breastplate unto the ephod.

On the breastplate there were 12 settings of gold that held 12 precious gemstones. These were polished and each was engraved with the name of one of the sons of Israel.

Looking at it straight on, the names from right to left (just like Hebrew is read and written), were 4 rows of 3 stones.

1. *The first row shall be* a sardius, a topaz, and an emerald, representing Reuben, Simeon, and Levi
2. the second row *shall be* a turquoise, a sapphire, and a diamond representing Judah, Dan and Naphtali.
3. the third row, a jacinth, an agate, and an amethyst for Gad, Asher and Issachar
4. the fourth row, a beryl, an onyx, and a jasper representing Zebulun, Joseph and Benjamin.

I've read a lot of interpretations for the meanings of these stones. The problem is multiplied because the names that are translate from the Hebrew are not "set in stone", that is, are the stones they used known by the names we know? The bottom line is, I could probably teach you about what they mean and how they relate to the Sons of Jacob, but I would be guessing as much as anybody else. Besides, proper interpretation requires that I describe how Moses thought of these stones and even harder, why the LORD told him to set it up this way.

I think what needs to be understood is that the High Priest was to keep the sons of Israel close to his heart when ministering to the LORD. He was also to understand that every person in every tribe was precious to God just as these stones were precious to man.

Make the breastplate of judgment: As I said before, two stones were placed in the breastplate: the **Urim and the Thummim**. These are translated "Lights and Perfections". These were used up until the time of David to help leaders to discern the will of God, especially when it came to warfare. One was white and one was black, that is, "yes" and "no". It was seen as an early form of "casting lots". The High Priest would simply judge a difficult matter by reaching in the breastplate for one of the stones.

(Exodus 28:31) "You shall make **the robe of the ephod all of blue.** (32) There shall be an opening for his head in the middle of it; it shall have a woven binding all around its opening, like the opening in a **coat of mail**, so that it does not tear. (((Habergeon – middle ages; coat of mail; geesh))) (33) And upon its hem you shall make pomegranates of blue, purple, and scarlet, all around its hem, and bells of gold between them all around: (34) a golden bell and a pomegranate, a golden bell and a pomegranate, upon the hem of the robe all around. (35) And it shall be upon Aaron when he ministers, and **its sound will be heard when he goes into the holy place before the LORD and when he comes out, that he may not die.**

The robe was a long blue sleeveless (as most people picture it) garment worn under the

ephod. It was large single piece of woven linen with a hole at the top with an appropriate binding. On the bottom hem of the garment were “pomegranates” fashioned from dyed thread and there were gold bells as well.

There is no evidence that a rope was tied around the priests leg so that if the bells stopped ringing the others would assume that he was dead and pull him out. Various but similar explanations are given. However, given that no one could see him in the Holy of Holies, it’s probably ok to say that the bells were to warn the other priests that the High Priest had died.

(Exodus 28:36) "You shall also make a plate of pure gold and engrave on it, like the engraving of a signet: HOLINESS TO THE LORD. (37) And you shall put it on a blue cord, that it may be on the turban; it shall be on the front of the turban. (38) So it shall be on Aaron's forehead, that Aaron may bear the iniquity of the holy things which the children of Israel hallow in all their holy gifts; and it shall always be on his forehead, that they may be accepted before the LORD.

It was written in the Jewish writings that the turban was wound around with 8 yards of linen. Attached to the turban with blue cord was a gold crown engraved with the words, “Holiness to the LORD”. The High Priest’s holiness was to ever be before God first! He answered to the LORD and not man. The High Priests were responsible for sanctifying even those things given by the people as “holy gifts” because they were touched with **iniquity**. God **accepted** them IF they were brought to Him in the prescribed manner and by the prescribed person, that is, the High Priest.

Ultimately, holiness is not as much about a legalistic list of rules, but in the power of a life **separated** to God.

(Exodus 28:39) "You shall skillfully weave the tunic of fine linen *thread*, you shall make the turban of fine linen, and you shall make the sash of woven work. (40) "For Aaron's sons you shall make tunics, and you shall make sashes for them. And you shall make hats for them, for glory and beauty. (41) So you shall put them on Aaron your brother and on his sons with him. You shall anoint them, consecrate them, and sanctify them, that they may minister to Me as priests.

Underneath the ephod and the blue robe was a tunic of white linen. Essentially, this was a garment for all priests. Includes were turbans and a sash. All white, signifying purity before the LORD.

There were three things that Moses was commanded to do:

1. **Anoint** – using specially perfumed olive oil, the priests had oil poured over them as a symbol of the Spirit of God on them so that they would be able to minister to the LORD.
2. **Consecrate** – the Hebrew word actually means to “fill up” or to make “full”. The idea is that they would be fully empowered to perform their duties.
3. **Sanctify** – as I noted before to sanctify someone is to set him for a specific purpose: to serve God.

Anointed by the Holy Spirit to be filled with power, wisdom, discernment (etc.) and then to separate from the defilements of the world is what these things are describing.

(Exodus 28:42) And you shall make for them linen trousers to cover their nakedness; they shall reach from the waist to the thighs. (43) They shall be on Aaron and on his sons when they come into the tabernacle of meeting, or when they come near the altar to minister in the holy *place*, that they do not incur iniquity and die. *It shall be* a statute forever to him and his descendants after him.

Finally, one last piece of clothing was the “underwear” that would cover their nakedness. Often the priests had to climb steps, for example, to wash in the laver. It was an affront to God to expose themselves in that manner.

What we have read is certainly a good picture of religion.

1. It's all outside in. Today you might go to a place of worship and everyone is dressed up, cleaned up and, pardon the pun, they are masked up. The New Covenant Scriptures call this person a hypocrite, which in the Greek means “stage actor”. Who they were inside was hidden by external coverings.
2. The rites and rituals were designed to keep people away from God. Even when liturgy was introduced into the service, its purpose was to ensure that people spoke the proper words to God. So, here are the songs you must sing and here are the prayers you must recite.
3. But I do love the beautiful way the garments of the High Priest were made and inspired by the Holy Spirit. The High Priest must have been glorious to watch. His clothes certainly set him apart.
4. Religion tries it's best to impress God with all it's pomp and circumstance. People in many churches do the same.

Certainly, Jesus stands in contrast to all of this. Surely what we just read about were shadows of something greater.

Hebrews 7:24-28 But He, because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood. (25) Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. (26) For such a High Priest was fitting for us, *who is* holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens (28) For the law appoints as high priests men who have weakness, but the word of the oath, which came after the law, *appoints* the Son who has been perfected forever.

Hebrews 9:11-15 NKJV But Christ came *as* High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. (12) Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.

But let's also take a quick look at our High Priest's life:

1. By way of contrast, Jesus most likely wore a plain linen tunic without anything embroidered on it to call attention to Him. His countenance was enough to attract people and I always pictured Him with dark eyes that seemed to penetrate the deepest hiding places of our hearts.
 - a. The only time He wore a purple robe was when He was scorned and mocked by Roman Soldiers.
2. The earthly High Priest bore Israel upon the Shoulders and He kept her close to the heart. But our High Priest, Jesus, did this as well – Instead of the stones the High Priest wore on His shoulders to remember his people, Jesus bore on His shoulders all of their sin and the sin of the world which He loved so much. We are more precious to Him than pure gold and gemstones.
3. The High Priest had a reminder of who he needed to be: **Holiness to the LORD** was his calling and engraved on gold that was attached to his turban. **Our Jesus** bore a crown of

thorns, the pain of which was a constant reminder of His calling.

4. Those around the cross didn't hear bells...they heard the sound of metal nails being driven through His wrists and feet, through bone and marrow into the hard wood of the cross.
5. And finally, there is NO **Urim and the Thummim** because He Himself is the Light of the World and there is none more Perfect than Him. He doesn't need these simple stones for He is in full control of **all** He created.