



Exodus - Chapter Twenty Eight

II. Exodus 19:1-40:38 - The Covenant at Sinai (continues)

II.d Exodus 25:1-31:17 - Instructions for the tabernacle (continues)

Summary of Chapter Twenty Eight

God now formally instructs Moses to call forward Aaron and his four sons to serve God as priests. The chapter is then taken up with the design of the various garments that they will wear when they come forward to serve God at the altar in the courtyard and attend their duties in the Holy Place.

II.d.ix Exodus 28:1-43 - Garments for the Priests

This chapter includes the command that Aaron and his sons will serve the Lord as priests (v.1) and describes the holy garments that are to be made for Aaron (vv.2-39) and his sons (vv.40-43).

II.d.ix.1 Exodus 28:1-5 - Vestments for the Priesthood

God commands Moses to call Aaron and his sons to the priesthood and to instruct the people of Israel to make the various garments Aaron was to wear.

¹ Then bring near to you your brother Aaron, and his sons with him, from among the Israelites, to serve me as priests — Aaron and Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar. ² You shall make sacred vestments for the glorious adornment of your brother Aaron.

Exodus 28:1-2

Then bring near to you your brother Aaron, and his sons with him. The priesthood of Israel was not earned by effort nor aspired to by ambition. It could only be inherited by birthright. One must be born into a priestly family, being a direct descendant of Aaron. The priesthood was no place for ambition or self-

glory. It was only entered into by God's call and invitation. Under the New Covenant, the priesthood is also not earned nor aspired to. Believers are priests because of their new birth into Jesus' priestly family: *<<Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ>>* (1 Peter 2:4-5).



The High Priest's Holy Garments

The illustration depicts the holy garments worn by the high priests.

The turban of fine linen held a plate of pure shining gold, on which were engraved the Hebrew words for 'Holy to YHWH.'

The ephod, a colourful linen torso garment held by a skilfully woven waistband, had two shoulder pieces, each holding an onyx stone. The names of the twelve sons of Israel were engraved on these two stones. The cloth breastpiece of judgement had four rows, each with three precious stones. Each of these stones had engraved upon it the name of one of the tribes of Israel. The breastpiece also contained the Urim and the Thummim, and was attached to the ephod by gold chains and rings. The blue robe was worn under the ephod; colourful imitation pomegranates lined the hem of the robe, alternating with golden bells. The white coat or tunic of chequered weave and fine linen was probably held by the embroidered sash under the robe.

The names of Aaron's sons are recorded in the genealogy of Aaron and Moses (6:23), preserving their lineage as those who were to serve as priests. The sons are listed here with the slight difference that they are set in pairs: Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar. The reference to Nadab and Abihu together seems to highlight the pair and prepare the reader to interpret the events of their death, refer to Leviticus 10:1-2, in light of their participation in the events of 24:9-11.

For the glorious adornment of your brother Aaron. Aaron's garments, like the tabernacle and its elements, were made from precious materials and decorated with vivid colours representing the glory of the Lord who is present in the midst of his people. The priestly garments were made for glory and for beauty. Since there was something glorious and beautiful - indeed, heavenly about the priestly service, it was appropriate to make the garments glorious and beautiful.

³ And you shall speak to all who have ability, whom I have endowed with skill, that they make Aaron's vestments to consecrate him for my priesthood. ⁴ These are the vestments that they shall make: a breastpiece, an ephod, a robe, a chequered tunic, a turban, and a sash. When they make these sacred vestments for your brother Aaron and his sons to serve me as priests, ⁵ they shall use gold, blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and fine linen.

Exodus 28:3-5

Speak to all who have ability, whom I have endowed with skill, that they make Aaron's vestments. God promised a special gifting from the Holy Spirit given to the craftsmen of these garments. If it is really done to the glory of God, practical, manual service requires the leading of the Holy Spirit just as much as what would normally be considered spiritual service.

To consecrate him for my priesthood. Three times in these first four verses, this command is repeated. Priests, under the old or new covenants, have their primary ministry to God himself.

These are the vestments that they shall make. Here are listed the various garments for the clothing of the priests and the High Priest. Each item on this list will be described in the following verses.

The ephod was essentially an ornate apron-like garment, made of gold, blue, purple, and crimson yarns. These are the same colours as the materials and yarns used in the tabernacle. These materials imply that the priests are close to God and act as his representatives to the people, e.g. in overseeing sacrifices, in pronouncing blessings, in teaching God's word, in administering justice, and in their example of holiness.

II.d.ix.2 Exodus 28:6-14 - The Ephod

The priestly mediation is two-way: God to Israel and Israel to God. The jewels on Aaron's robes represent the twelve tribes of Israel, on whose behalf Aaron enters God's presence. The ephod is to have two onyx stones, each engraved with six of the names of the sons of Israel.

⁶ They shall make the ephod of gold, of blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and of fine twisted linen, skilfully worked. ⁷ It shall have two shoulder-pieces attached to its two edges, so that it may be joined together. ⁸ The decorated band on it shall be of the same workmanship and materials, of gold, of blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and of fine twisted linen. ⁹ 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 the names of the remaining six on the other stone, in the order of their birth. ¹¹ As a gem-cutter engraves signets, so you shall engrave the two stones with the names of the sons of Israel; you shall mount them in settings of gold filigree. ¹² You shall set the two stones on the shoulder-pieces of the ephod, as stones of remembrance for the sons of Israel; and Aaron shall bear their names before the Lord on his two shoulders for remembrance. ¹³ You shall make settings of gold filigree, ¹⁴ and two chains of pure gold, twisted like cords; and you shall attach the corded chains to the settings.

Exodus 28:6-14

You shall take two onyx stones, and engrave on them the names of the sons of Israel. On the shoulder straps were polished gemstones on each strap, with the inscription of six of the tribes on each stone. Therefore, the High Priest would bear their names before the Lord on his two shoulders for remembrance.

While the first ministry of a priest is always unto God himself, a priest also is constantly connected to the people, bearing them on his shoulders. The shoulders are a place of work; therefore in the priest's ministry unto the Lord, he also worked for and with the people.

II.d.ix.3 Exodus 28:15-30 - The Breastplate

The breastpiece of judgement is to have twelve different stones set in four rows of three, each with the name of one of the twelve tribes. The ephod and the breastpiece together represent the value that the Lord places upon his people as a whole nation, i.e. six names each on two onyx stones, and as individual tribes, that is, each named on an individual precious stone. Note how similar stones adorn the

New Jerusalem in Revelation 21:12-21. These two pieces of Aaron's clothing also indicate that he is to act as a representative on behalf of the twelve tribes before the Lord in order to bring them to remembrance.

¹⁵ You shall make a breastpiece of judgement, in skilled work; you shall make it in the style of the ephod; of gold, of blue and purple and crimson yarns, and of fine twisted linen you shall make it. ¹⁶ It shall be square and doubled, a span in length and a span in width. ¹⁷ You shall set in it four rows of stones. A row of carnelian, chrysolite, and emerald shall be the first row; ¹⁸ and the second row a turquoise, a sapphire, and a moonstone; ¹⁹ and 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 filigree. ²¹ There shall be twelve stones with names corresponding to the names of the sons of Israel; they shall be like signets, each engraved with its name, for the twelve tribes. ²² You shall make for the breastpiece chains of pure gold, twisted like cords; ²³ and you shall make for the breastpiece two rings of gold, and put the two rings on the two edges of the breastpiece. ²⁴ You shall put the two cords of gold in the two rings at the edges of the breastpiece; ²⁵ the two ends of the two cords you shall attach to the two settings, and so attach it in front to the shoulder-pieces of the ephod. ²⁶ You shall make two rings of gold, and put them at the two ends of the breastpiece, on its inside edge next to the ephod. ²⁷ You shall make two rings of gold, and attach them in front to the lower part of the two shoulder-pieces of the ephod, at its joining above the decorated band of the ephod. ²⁸ The breastpiece shall be bound by its rings to the rings of the ephod with a blue cord, so that it may lie on the decorated band of the ephod, and so that the breastpiece shall not come loose from the ephod. ²⁹ So Aaron shall bear the names of the sons of Israel in the breastpiece of judgement on his heart when he goes into the holy place, for a continual remembrance before the Lord. ³⁰ In the breastpiece of judgement you shall put the Urim and the Thummim, and they shall be on Aaron's heart when he goes in before the Lord; thus Aaron shall bear the judgement of the Israelites on his heart before the Lord continually.

Exodus 28:15-30

You shall make a breastpiece of judgement. The breastplate was also made with gold, blue, purple, and crimson yarn. It was attached to the ephod with gold chains.

You shall set in it four rows of stones. On the breastplate were four rows of three gemstones, each stone having one of the names of the twelve tribes inscribed on it. In wearing the breastplate, the High Priest would bear the names of the sons of Israel on his heart. It was not enough that the High Priest worked for the people, by having them on his shoulders. He must also love the people, that is, bear them on his heart. It is not enough for a priest to have a heart for God. He must also have a heart for the people, and bear them on his heart in his entire ministry unto the Lord.

A row of carnelian, chrysolite, and emerald. This begins a list of twelve gemstones set in the breastplate of the high priest. It is impossible to know exactly what all of these gemstones were; but some likely conclusions can be drawn. Revelation 21:19-20 describes the foundations of the walls of the New Jerusalem with a series of twelve gemstones, which may answer to these stones in the breastplate. A believer cannot neglect the fact God commanded the tribes to have their names inscribed on gemstones, truly precious things. God's people are indeed precious to him.

The Urim and the Thummim were to be placed in the breastpiece of judgement and carried before the Lord, but their function is not fully explained. From several contexts where they are referred to in the OT, it appears that the Urim and Thummim, whatever they were, were used in seeking the Lord's decision on particular matters; refer to Numbers 27:21; 1 Samuel 23:9, 28:6 and 30:7-8; and Ezra 2:63.

Three times in this passage the breastplate is called the breastplate of judgement because it held the Urim and the Thummim which were tools for discerning God's will. The names Urim and Thummim mean 'Lights and Perfections.' Although, as stated, there is no certainty what they actually were, the best guess is that they were a pair of stones, one light and another dark, and each stone indicated a 'yes' or 'no' from God. The High Priest would ask God a question, reach into the breastplate, and pull out either a 'yes' or a 'no.'

The key to the effectiveness of the Urim and Thummim was that God's Word gave them. In seeking God through the Urim and Thummim, one was really going back to God's Word for guidance, because it was the word of God that commanded their place and allowed their use. Today, when there is the same focus on God's Word, he will guide readers also. One old preacher was asked to explain the Urim and Thummim. He said, "Well, this is how I understand it.

When I need to know God's will, I get out my Bible and I do a lot of usin' and thummin' through my Bible, and God always speaks to me." More Christians would know God's will if they did more usin' and thummin'.

II.d.ix.4 Exodus 28:31-43 - Other Priestly Vestments

These final verses describe the other robes that the men were to wear for their duty as priests before God.

³¹ You shall make the robe of the ephod all of blue. ³² It shall have an opening for the head in the middle of it, with a woven binding round the opening, like the opening in a coat of mail, so that it may not be torn. ³³ On its lower hem you shall make pomegranates of blue, purple, and crimson yarns, all round the lower hem, with bells of gold between them all round — ³⁴ a golden bell and a pomegranate alternating all round the lower hem of the robe. ³⁵ Aaron shall wear it when he ministers, and its sound shall be heard when he goes into the holy place before the Lord, and when he comes out, so that he may not die.

Exodus 28:31-35

You shall make the robe of the ephod all of blue. This was the basic covering of the priest, made of all blue, and was seamless with no tear for the head opening.

Bells of gold between them all round. On its hem, between the ornate pomegranates of blue and purple, were bells, so the priest could be heard while ministering before God. If the High Priest were to die, the bells would stop ringing and he could be pulled out of the Most Holy Place by a rope he wore tied around his waist. The sound of the bells would remind the priest of the solemn nature of his work, and remind him so that he may not die. Approaching God carelessly can lead to death (19:21-25). Every aspect of the tabernacle service involves intentional actions on the part of the priests and the people that are meant to teach Israel that the Lord is holy. The Lord did not need to be alerted to Aaron's presence by the sound of bells, but they served to greet God reverently when Aaron entered and left the tabernacle.

³⁶ You shall make a rosette of pure gold, and engrave on it, like the engraving of a signet, 'Holy to the Lord.' ³⁷ You shall fasten it on the turban with a blue cord; it shall be on the front of the turban. ³⁸ It shall be on Aaron's forehead, and Aaron shall take on himself any guilt incurred in the holy offering that the Israelites consecrate as their sacred donations; it shall always be on his forehead, in order that they may find favour before the Lord.

Exodus 28:36-38

It shall be on the front of the turban. The turban was a simple wound linen headpiece. More important than the turban itself was the gold plate with the inscription Holy to the Lord. The inscription on the plate, which the priest bears on his forehead, declares that the priest and those he represents, as well as the priestly services, are all Holy to the Lord.

Aaron shall take on himself any guilt incurred in the holy offering that the Israelites consecrate as their sacred donations. Even the gifts and sacrifices Aaron and the other priests brought before the Lord were touched with iniquity. Yet when God's appointed priest in God brought them in God's appointed way, God accepted them.

In order that they may find favour before the Lord. Holiness, not as a legalistic list of rules, but in the power of a life separated to God, is essential for anyone who will appear before God. Hebrews 12:14 reinforced this principle: <<*Pursue peace with everyone, and the holiness without which no one will see the Lord*>>.

³⁹ You shall make the chequered tunic of fine linen, and you shall make a turban of fine linen, and you shall make a sash embroidered with needlework.

Exodus 28:39

Embroidered with needlework. These basic garments are simply described as being woven of fine linen, yet are to be skilfully made to the highest level.

⁴⁰ For Aaron's sons you shall make tunics and sashes and head-dresses; you shall make them for their glorious adornment. ⁴¹ You shall put them on your brother Aaron, and on his sons with him, and shall anoint them and ordain them and consecrate them, so that they may serve me as priests. ⁴² You shall make for them linen undergarments to cover their naked flesh; they shall reach from the hips to the thighs; ⁴³ Aaron and his sons shall wear them when they go into the tent of meeting, or when they come near the altar to minister in the holy place; or they will bring guilt on themselves and die. This shall be a perpetual ordinance for him and for his descendants after him.

Exodus 28:40-43

For Aaron's sons you shall make tunics and sashes and head-dresses. Although the regular priests had special garments, they were simple clothes of fine linen.

They were special, but not much compared to the glory and beauty of the High Priest's garments. This is because the regular priests, although important, had a far lesser office than the High Priest and were appropriately clothed for this lower position. Even so, the High Priest's clothing, in total, speaks more of Jesus' glory and beauty than of his followers. They are, or at least should be, content with simple linen robes.

You shall put them on your brother Aaron, and on his sons with him, and shall anoint them and ordain them and consecrate them, so that they may serve me as priests. Here God explained three important and essential aspects to the preparation of his servants: anointing, consecration, and sanctification. They are separated because here they indicated three different ideas.

You shall make for them linen undergarments to cover their naked flesh. The requirement related to the linen undergarments so that Aaron and his sons will not **bring guilt on themselves and die** expounds the rule in 20:26 about not approaching God's altar naked. This again links up with the Eden imagery. Adam and Eve had to wear clothes in God's presence after the fall. So must the priests in the tabernacle.

There is a contrast between Jesus' clothing when he accomplished his great priestly work and the garments of the High Priest:

1. Jesus wore no beautiful ephod, only a purple robe for mocking.
2. Jesus had no precious gems on his shoulders, only the Cross that sinful humanity deserved.
3. Jesus had no breastplate with 'Israel on his heart,' yet he died of a broken heart for Israel and, indeed, for all of mankind.
4. As the High Priest, Jesus had a seamless robe that was not torn, but it was stripped away at the Cross.
5. Jesus heard no delicate sound of bells proving that the High Priest was alive, only the sound of pounding nails ensuring his death as the ultimate High Priest.
6. Jesus wore no fine linen turban, rather a painful crown of thorns.
7. Jesus had no head-plate reading Holy to the Lord, but had led a life and died a death showing nothing but holiness to the Lord!
8. Jesus had no linen trousers to hide his nakedness, rather he bore the sins of all on the Cross in a naked shame.