

THE HIGH PRIEST AND HIS GARMENTS

by C.W. Slemming

An exposition of the Old Testament high priest's holy garments described in Exodus chapters 28 and 39. The work examines each element of Aaron's priestly attire and its spiritual significance as a type of Christ's mediatorial ministry.

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(Exodus chapters 28 and 39) This picture shows the high priest in his "holy garments for ministering in the Holy Place" (Exodus 39:1). Aaron was the first high priest; he was Moses' brother. After Aaron died, subsequent high priests were his descendants, the sons of Aaron. The high priest was responsible for the Tabernacle, its daily offerings and functions and also its regular Feasts, three times in the year: at Passover, at Pentecost and at Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement (which was followed by a week of joy in the Feast of Tabernacles), as seen from Leviticus chapter 23. On the Day of Atonement, it was uniquely the high priest's responsibility to take the blood of the sacrificed goat into the Holy of Holies on behalf of all God's people, for forgiveness of their sins. This awesome responsibility required a sanctified person (Exodus 29), the high priest, dressed in "holy garments". The uppermost holy garment is apron-like and is called the Ephod. On top of the Ephod there is the square breastplate, with twelve precious stones. On the shoulders are two additional precious stones. The blue garment is called the robe, under which the high priest wore a white fine linen woven tunic. On his head is the white fine linen turban. Round the base of the turban is the crown of gold, saying "HOLY TO THE LORD".

All of these garments and items have a wonderful significance. Once we understand what these tell us about the heavenly High Priest, Jesus, we will find a deep-seated thankfulness rising up from within our spirit, and an encouragement to draw near to God with a purified heart in full assurance of faith (Hebrews 13:15; Hebrews 10:22). The Ephod (Exodus 28:5-14; Exodus 39:2-7)

The Ephod is the apron-like garment worn by the high priest. It was made in four colours: blue, purple, scarlet and the white of the fine linen. These are the same colours that can be seen at the Door to the Outer Court, the Door to the Sanctuary and in the Veil; they refer to Christ as He is revealed in the four gospels. There is an important additional feature of the Ephod, though: gold thread (cut from gold plate) was interwoven with the other colours (Exodus 39:3). Gold is not only precious, it implies 'of God, divine and heavenly'. In the four colours we see Jesus as He was in His earthly ministry. Jesus has lived as a man on earth, a working man, the carpenter of Nazareth (Mark 6:3); He also knows what is involved when having to rely on others to provide for His living (Luke 8:3). He knows what it means to be tired out (John 4:6), hungry (Matthew 4:2 : Mark 6:31), thirsty (John 4:7), pressurised (Mark 1:32-34; Mark 2:2; Mark 5:22-24), tempted (Luke 4:2 Hebrews 2:18), bereaved (John 11:35), desparate in prayer (Luke 22:44 Hebrews 5:7), disappointed by friends in a time of need (Luke 22:45-46), in pain (Matthew 27:26), mocked and spat on (Matthew 27:29-31), He knows what it is to die (Luke 23:46). Because He has passed through all these experiences, and many others also, the four colours tell us He is able to sympathize with us (Hebrews 4:15).

Also embroidered into the Ephod is the gold thread, a beautiful 'type' of Christ's heavenly ministry as great High Priest for His own. He is risen from the dead, He has ascended to heaven and is seated at the right hand of God (1 Corinthians 15:3-4; Hebrews 1:3). There, as a merciful and

compassionate High Priest, Jesus always lives and prays for His own to help them in their difficulties (Hebrews 2:17). Furthermore, because He is risen from the dead and ascended to heaven, He is also ABLE to do something through His interceding for us (Hebrews 7:25): He aids us (Hebrews 2:16), showing us His mercy and ministering to us the supply of His grace to help in time of need (Hebrews 4:16), especially when we face temptation (Hebrews 2:18). The Shoulder Stones (Exodus 28:9-12)

On each shoulder-piece of the Ephod was a precious stone. Six names were written on each of the stones, altogether naming the twelve tribes of Israel. Every time the high priest went before God at the Golden Incense Altar, the names of all the people of God were upon His shoulders.

Jesus is the Good Shepherd (John 10:11). He knows His sheep (John 10:14) and goes after each one that is lost in the wilderness (Luke 15:4). Individually, when He finds each sheep that is lost, the Good Shepherd lays them on His shoulder (Luke 15:5-7). The shoulder stones represent the collective good shepherding by the Lord Jesus in millions of lives. He bears them all before God as today in heaven He is interceding for us (Romans 8:34 Hebrews 7:25). The shoulders speak of His strength. How powerful and prevailing His intercession has been in our lives! The Breastplate (Exodus 28:15-30)

The breastplate was square in its proportions, and also embroidered with gold. Set into the Breastplate in gold were twelve precious stones, one for each of the twelve tribes of Israel. Each stone had the name of the respective tribe engraved upon it. This shows the Good Shepherd knows His sheep so well He calls them each by their own name (John 10:3). The high priest bears the names on the Breastplate "over His heart" when he goes before the Lord "as a memorial" (Exodus 28:29), foreshadowing the eternal love of the Lord Jesus for His sheep (John 13:1).

All this is not for those who do not believe. Sadly, they are still outside the Tabernacle, not having yet entered through the Door into the Outer Court. Their names are not yet written on His heart. They are like the rich man in Luke 16:19, whose name is not even known; by contrast, the name of the poor man Lazarus is known even to Abraham (Luke 16:25), despite his sores and beggarly state. Both men had heard the words of Moses and the prophets warning them, but the rich man had not believed, nor would he have believed even if one had risen from the dead (Luke 16:29-31). "I won't believe something I can't even see" is the common protest of the comfortable. The trouble is, by the time they are confronted with the reality it is often too late: they are dead. So, my friend, when you hear the Shepherd's voice, when He calls you by name, allow Him to lead you: follow Him (John 10:3-4; John 10:25-27). The names known to the high priest are engraved on the stones. This is no passing whim, they cannot be erased: "I give My sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand" (John 10:28). As the high priest goes about the service of the Holy Place, wearing the Breastplate with the engraved names,

- he passes the Lampstand and light shines onto the names (the Light of Life, John 8:12),

he approaches the Showbread Table and the names are corresponded with one another in a fellowship of nourishment (the Bread of Life, John 6:35),

he comes before the Golden Incense Altar and bears the names individually and collectively before God, praying that we may be given eternal life, which means to know the only true God in

Jesus Christ, the Messiah (John 17:3).

Here in the Holy Place, the emphasis is on life. Jesus the great High Priest has come so that they (the names) may have life, even eternal life, and have it abundantly (John 10:10). The High Priest must yet bring us into the Holy of Holies for the fullest view and experience of eternal life, though. For us to enter in and have this life abundantly and eternally, the Veil must be removed. It must be rent from top to bottom, by God (see Matthew 27:51). Then we have access through Him (the Veil) inside One Spirit (typified by both the anointed unique high priest and by the anointed Tabernacle, now made into just one room) unto the Father (Ephesians 2:18). Inside the Holy of Holies we find the Ark of the Covenant, containing: i.the two tablets containing the 'ten words' (Deuteronomy 10:4, Hebrew), which are the words of eternal life (John 6:68), collectively the Word of Life (1 John 1:1), Aaron's rod that budded (the Resurrection and the Life, John 11:25) ii.the Golden Pot of 'Hidden' Manna (Manna normally evaporated when the sun came up, but this 'Hidden' Manna was kept before the Lord as a memorial, therefore implying the eternal life given to us by the Bread of God, Jesus John 6:33; John 6:58; John 17:3).

Jesus our great High Priest carries the names of all His redeemed ones on His strong shoulders. Besides that, all the individual names are brought together in groups, separated only by genealogy and by locality of dwelling (like the tribes of Israel). The collective names are permanently (like each engraved stone of the breastplate) carried on His loving heart. The Breastplate is therefore a foreshadow of the one Church expressed as local churches, one in each place, in God's design. The Breastplate was folded double to form a pocket. Inside the pocket the Urim and Thummin were kept. Urim means 'lights' and Thummin means 'perfections'. They were probably two jewels. When someone had to make an important decision, the request was made known to the high priest. He would stand before the Lampstand, holding the Urim in one hand and the Thummin in the other. As the light reflected from the Urim and the Thummin onto the stones of the Breastplate, this flash of light provided up to 24 combinations (2 x 12). Since there are 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet, the flashes of light could produce strings of letters. As God breathed through the Ark, the Veil would move, permitting a breeze to flicker the flames in the Lampstand to momentarily alter the angle of direction of the light onto the Urim and Thummin, and thence to the Breastplate. Thus God was able to communicate directly, but not audibly, to the high priest and answer the enquiry. The Robe (Exodus 28:31-35)

The Robe was made entirely of blue. It had a hem, attached to which were pommegranate motifs (in blue, purple and scarlet), with golden bells alternating in between the pommegranates. The golden bells were an audible announcement of the high priest's service, a beautiful sound, backed up by beautiful fruits, the pommegranates. This same balance of words and deeds we find in the Lord Jesus (Luke 24:19). The Turban and the Crown (Exodus 28:36-39)

The Turban was made of white fine linen. Generally, fine white linen signifies righteous deeds (Revelation 19:8). Here the emphasis is on our mind, the covering of our thought processes, "taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5) by taking "the helmet of salvation" (Ephesians 6:17). Our mind is the big problem. When Zechariah saw the vision of Joshua (Zechariah 3:1-5), the Lord began to address the problem of the filthy garments (v3) by putting a clean Turban on his head (v5). Since the Hebrew words for Joshua (Yoshuah) and salvation (yeshuah) are so close, we see here the picture of taking up the helmet of salvation, to

deal with our filthy thoughts of unrighteousness.

Attached to the Turban and upon the forehead of the high priest was the Crown, a gold plate on which "HOLY TO THE LORD" was engraved. This seal of God is legitimately there on the forehead of our Lord Jesus Christ, our great High Priest. But for us, whom He has also made priests (Revelation 1:5-6), there is a clear indication that we are not just to be outwardly dressed up in Christ; He must transform us, by the renewing of our mind that we may prove the will of God: our sanctification (Romans 12:2 & 1 Thessalonians 4:3). How we need to be renewed in the spirit of our mind, to put on the new man created in righteousness and true holiness (Ephesians 4:23-24)!

Finally ...

"Holy brothers, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the High Priest, Jesus" (Hebrews 3:1)

"Seeing we have such a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, a High Priest who can sympathize with our weaknesses (being tempted in all points as we are, yet without sin), let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:14-16).

Page authored by Martyn Barrow. The Breastplate and Ephod of the High Priest

After much research, the twelve types of stones in the breastplate have been found, each of which has special characteristics. In Exodus 28, G-d commanded Aaron to make the ephod and breastplate for the garments of the high priest and his descendants. G-d gave all the details connected to these two important items and named the twelve stones. This allowed our generation "the generation of the redemption of Israel" to find the stones. Each of the stones carried the name of one of the twelve tribes of Israel. The high priest wore the breastplate on the ephod. When the people of Israel enquired of G-d concerning an important issue, the high priest asked G-d the question. G-d answered through the twelve stones. For example, when they wanted to know whether they should go out to war, the high priest asked G-d and G-d answered through the breastplate in this way: the relevant letters of the name of the tribe shone and together they formed G-d's answer. It was in this special way that G-d spoke to Israel. The Ephod The sages also found spiritual values and practical influences of the stones of the breastplate besides their holy task. Rabbi Bechaiei said that each of the stones attracted heavenly strength and in the Midrash in Bereshit Raba 14 it is written that each of the stones receives strength from heaven. The Kabbala tells us that the twelve stones matched the attributes of the tribes. According to researchers the twelve stones also have healing values. The stone of Reuven, the Odem (ruby), is good for pregnant women, strengthens the heart and calms the mood; Shimon, the Piteda (topaz), cleanses the blood and teaches the benefit of the doubt; Levi, the Bareket (beryl), increases wisdom and aids learning; Judah, the Nofech (turquoise), calms the mood and removes worry; Isachar, the Sapir (sapphire), strengthens the eyes and brings peace; Zebulun, Yahalom (diamond), brings longevity, and helps in earning a livelihood; Dan, Leshem (jacinth), strengthens a weak heart, brings joy and success to the wearer; Naftali, Shvo (agate), brings peace and happiness and repels the "evil eye"; Gad, Ahlama (jasper), gives strength and removes worry and fear; Asher, Tarshish (emerald), increases wisdom, gives courage and the wearer finds favor in the eyes of fellow men, and it brings success in business; Joseph, Shoham (onyx), is a remedy for

restoring memory and improving sight, enables the wearer to speak wisely; Benjamin, Yashfe (jade), prevents hemorrhaging, improves sight and aids in childbirth. As we see, the breastplate and the ephod had an important part in the Temple and in the life of the people of Israel. We hope that in the near future the reconstructed breastplate and ephod will be completed for the high priest for worship in the Third Temple.

Other important projects include two silver trumpets and the solid gold seven-branched menorah.
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