

God told Moses to build a tabernacle before He explained how it would function. In the chapter for today, the clothing of the priest is described. It is important that we see what God was conveying in the imagery of the priest's garments. Next week we'll see his ordination and daily duties.

The very first verse of the chapter sets the tone for what the chapter will describe. "Bring near" is technical term that means to consecrate. To consecrate something is to set it apart for holy use. The clothing that the priests will wear is a part of that "setting apart". They were just like any other men. We'll see in a few weeks that Aaron was probably in the midst of making an idol while God was giving the instructions for his glorious garments. If Aaron was perfect, he wouldn't need to be consecrated.

The consecration begins with special clothing. For the High Priest, Aaron, the most important article of clothing was the ephod. It was similar to an apron. It was to be woven of linen that was blue, purple, scarlet and interlaced with threads of gold. The priest matched the material of the Tabernacle, which visibly showed that this was his place, his sacred duty.

The ephod was sleeveless and made in two parts. There was a front piece and the back. The two pieces were joined at the shoulder with an onyx stone on each shoulder where the halves joined. On each of the stones were written the names of the tribes of Israel, six on one and six on the other. The idea was that he carried the burden of the people on his shoulders. He carried them before the God of Israel when he went into the Tabernacle. Exodus 28:12 (ESV)<sup>12</sup> *And 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.* It is not that God would forget that Aaron represented the nation, but that Aaron needed to be reminded that that was his ministry.

On the front of the ephod hung the breastplate. That translation sounds like armor but it was made of the same material and of the same color as the ephod. It was actually a big pocket about 9 inches square. On the front of the pocket were four rows of three stones. The precious and semi-precious stone colors were the same colors as the ensigns of the tribe they represented. Each stone had the name of a tribe inscribed on it.

The breastpiece was attached to the ephod and onyx stone with a golden braid above so that it always stayed over the heart of priest. The bottom portion was attached with a blue cord to the ephod and the sash or band that went around the waist of the priest.

The breastplate was sometimes called the breastpiece of judgment, or decision. Exodus 28:30 (ESV)<sup>30</sup> *And in the breastpiece of judgment 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 judgment of the people of Israel on his heart before the LORD regularly.*

Inside the breastpiece were the Urim and Thumim. Literally the Hebrew words meant "lights" and "perfections". We can only speculate from Biblical passages as to what they were and how they were used. There are three main suggestions about them. One is that they were two stones identical in size and shape, but one was white and the other black. When important decisions for the nation had to be decided the leader would come to the priest and ask a yes or no question. This may be the way in which the scapegoat was chosen on the Day of Atonement. The priest would go before the Lord in the Tabernacle and reach in and pull out a stone. The white stone would mean "yes" and the black one would mean "no". Because the names are plural, some suggest there were a number of stones and the majority color would decide.

Others think that because one of the stones is named "lights" the answer could be seen by which stone glowed. I think the New Age would be excited about that suggestion.

Still others believe that the words don't stand for stones at all, but rather that the sacred names of God were written on a parchment and kept in the breastpiece. When the priest sought an answer from the Lord in the Holy Place, they believe God would stir the air and the lights of the lampstand would cause the letters on the stones on the front of the breastpiece to light up, spelling out the instruction from the Lord, a kind of super natural trust in God's involvement in every detail. Their reasoning comes from the Hebrew letters beginning the words Urim and Thummim. They are the first and last letters of the Hebrew alphabet.

However it worked, we do know that even up to the time of the restoration, the Urim and Thummim helped the people make decisions of national importance. (Ezra 2:63) Hosea predicted that the time was coming when they would not have the ephod to consult. He prophesied the day was coming when they would seek the Lord their God and David their king in the latter days. We are still looking forward to the day when Jews realize the Son of David is their king and Messiah. (Hosea 2:5)

Under the ephod, the priest had a blue robe. On the bottom edge were alternating bells of gold and pomegranates made of blue and red yarn. Exodus 28:35 (ESV) <sup>35</sup> *And it shall be on Aaron 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 does not die.*

During the Tabernacle tours we told of how the priest would have a rope around his ankle to extract him in case he died in the Lord's presence. The holy presence of God was dangerous to those who came in without being fully prepared. It wasn't something one did lightly. But why do the bells prevent him from dying? Some would say it warns God that it is the priest coming in so that He veils His glory enough for the priest to survive. Others believe that it is for the priest to be reminded that he dare not take the encounter without being fully prepared according to God's requirements.

**Commented [Paul1]:** Ezra 2:63 (ESV)

<sup>63</sup> The governor told them that they were not to partake of the most holy food, until there should be a priest to consult Urim and Thummim.

**Commented [Paul2]:** Hosea 3:5 (ESV)

<sup>5</sup> Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the LORD their God, and David their king, and they shall come in fear to the LORD and to his goodness in the latter days.

Under the blue robe was a checker pattern linen tunic, like the one Aaron's sons would wear. Under that a pair of breeches, like underwear from the belly to the thighs.

He also wore a turban with a golden band that declared, "holiness to the Lord". All of these articles of clothing were things that consecrated him for his ministry. They set him apart as the one man who goes in before God and represents the people to God. The passage says these clothes are *for holiness, glory and beauty*. To approach God, these three elements were a necessity.

As we saw in the Tabernacle that everything points to Jesus, so we will see in the clothing of the priest. The problem with the priesthood was that every descendent of Aaron, and Aaron himself, were imperfect people who could never really fully represent their people before God. They had their own sins. God may have overlooked their sin for the time because of their obedience to His Word in how they were to come before Him, but they needed something to atone for their sins as well. The bull that they slew for their ordination was good enough for the ritual, but it was not the reality that would save them. (Hebrews 10:4) Though they represented holiness, glory and beauty, in actuality, they were a far cry from the real thing.

The real thing is Jesus. Think of each of the articles of clothing and how it could point to none other than our Savior. The onyx stones on the shoulder of the priest represented carrying the burdens of the tribes before the Lord.

I confess, I get overwhelmed with the burdens of the people. My shoulders simply are not big enough. The more I care, the fewer number of situations I'm able to really carry. There is only one way that I can take on the situations in your lives. That is to know that I can put it on Jesus' shoulders. His shoulders are big enough for the burdens of all mankind! **Jesus and Jesus alone has the shoulders to take the burdens of mankind before God.** (Hebrews 4:15a) I try to help carry some for a while, but eventually I have to give them to Jesus.

Scripture actually invites us to cast our burden on Him. (1Peter 5:7) Even your own burdens and those of your family are often more than you can bear, but they're never too much for Jesus' broad shoulders. He brings them to remembrance before the Father and you will either receive the grace you need or the change for which you've been praying. (1Corinthians 12:9)

Then there is the breastplate. The book of Isaiah tells us we are engraved on the Lord's hand (Isaiah 49:16), but the breastplate tells us we are engraved over His heart. He is never unaware of what you are facing. He is never out of touch with your pain. His children are close to His heart. (Song 8:6a) The names on the stones were there because they were in covenant with God. You can be sure your name is on His heart if you have entered the New Covenant. (1Corinthians 11:25) Exodus began with God remembering the covenant He made with their father, Abraham. (Exodus 2:24)

And consider how He represents you, as a jewel, a treasure, a precious stone. Each was unique from all the others, valued, and desired. When Jesus intercedes for you before

**Commented [Paul3]: Hebrews 10:4 (ESV)**

<sup>4</sup> For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

**Commented [Paul4]: Hebrews 4:15a (ESV)**

<sup>15</sup> For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses...

**Commented [Paul5]: 1 Peter 5:7 (ESV)**

<sup>7</sup> casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.

**Commented [Paul6]: 2 Corinthians 12:9 (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup> But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

**Commented [Paul7]: Isaiah 49:16 (ESV)**

<sup>16</sup> Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are continually before me.

**Commented [Paul8]: Song of Songs 8:6a (NIV)**

<sup>6</sup> Place me like a seal over your heart,

**Commented [Paul9]: 1 Corinthians 11:25 (ESV)**

<sup>25</sup> In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."

**Commented [Paul10]: Exodus 2:24-25 (NIV)**

<sup>24</sup> God heard their groaning and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob.

<sup>25</sup> So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them.

the Father, there upon His heart is your name and mine. (John 10:3) And what the Son asks for, the Father gives. (John 13:3) Praise God!

The blue robe represents the fact that Jesus is from heaven while the linen tells us that He is also one of us. The priests ministered in their bare feet. That means the scars on His feet always testify to God that He paid the price for our redemption. (Hebrews 6:19-20)

The whole of the priest's wardrobe was to consecrate him and present him glorious, holy, and beautiful. That is what was required to approach God. Can anyone honestly say that there was anyone more glorious than Jesus? Glory is the breaking forth of the attributes of God. We never saw those attributes expressed more clearly than in Jesus. (Hebrews 1:3)

Jesus' righteous anger drove the money changers from the Temple, and ministered mercy to the "sinners". The prostitute is told her sins, though many, are forgiven, and the self-righteous Pharisees are called a brood of vipers. The widow's son was raised to life, the Gentiles servant healed, but the legalism that would keep healing from the needy on the Sabbath was condemned. (Matthew 12:12) He was glorious in every word and deed, glorious in the way He lived and died, and glorious in the way He rose from the dead!

None was holy like Jesus. Though many accused Him being of an evil source, none could condemn a single action. (John 8:46) When they condemned His Words it was a distortion of what He actually said or refusal to recognize the truth. His holiness was verified in resurrection.

And He is all beautiful. Holiness is beautiful. (1 Chronicles 16:29) David longed to linger in the courts of the Lord and behold His beauty. (Psalm 27:4) Righteousness is beautiful. Truth is beautiful. If there was ever a beautiful life, it was Jesus'.

The priest's robes represented all these things, but Jesus was all those things in heart and action. The priest needed a gold plate on his forehead that declared holiness to the Lord. Jesus' mind was holy. Priest after priest failed to be all that God called them to be, but not our High Priest Jesus. He fulfilled all that was required of the letter and Spirit of the law, and remains our High Priest forever. (Hebrews 7:28)

Do you realize that if you are in Christ, the Father sees in you that same righteousness? (2Corinthians 5:21; Isaiah 54:17) That is why the Apostle Paul says to put on the Lord Jesus Christ. (Romans 13:14) That is like donning those priestly robes. It is the reality of what they represent. **If you are in Christ, the Father sees you as glorious, holy and beautiful.** You are consecrated. You have the privilege to approach God!

I know some of you have struggled with the assurance of your salvation. You are afraid your life isn't perfect enough or you haven't had the right experience. Grab hold of this! If you are in Jesus, trusting in what He did for you, you are in those robes! You are accepted!

**Commented [Paul11]: John 10:3 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.

**Commented [Paul12]: John 13:3 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God,

**Commented [Paul13]: Hebrews 6:19-20 (NIV)**

<sup>19</sup> We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain,

<sup>20</sup> where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.

**Commented [Paul14]: Hebrews 1:3 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

**Commented [Paul15]: Matthew 12:12 (ESV)**

<sup>12</sup> Of how much more value is a man than a sheep! So it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath."

**Commented [Paul16]: John 8:46 (ESV)**

<sup>46</sup> Which one of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me?

**Commented [Paul17]: 1 Chronicles 16:29 (KJV)**

<sup>29</sup> Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name: bring an offering, and come before him: worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness.

**Commented [Paul18]: Psalm 27:4 (KJV)**

<sup>4</sup> One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to enquire in his temple.

**Commented [Paul19]: Hebrews 7:28 (ESV)**

<sup>28</sup> For the law appoints men in their weakness as high priests, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever.

**Commented [Paul20]: 2 Corinthians 5:21 (NIV)**

<sup>21</sup> God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

**Commented [Paul21]: Isaiah 54:17 (ESV)**

<sup>17</sup> no weapon that is fashioned against you shall succeed, and you shall confute every tongue that rises against you in judgment. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD and their vindication from me, declares the LORD."

**Commented [Paul22]: Romans 13:14 (ESV)**

<sup>14</sup> But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

Now, hear what the author of Hebrews says about Jesus. Hebrews 7:26-28 (ESV) <sup>26</sup> *For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens.* <sup>27</sup> *He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself.* <sup>28</sup> *For the law appoints men in their weakness as high priests, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever.* With a priest like that, we are surely blessed!

Finally, there is the Urim and Thummim. It is the breastplate of decision Jesus wears so well. Many of us would like a little pair of magic rocks in our front pocket to tell us what to do. Come to think of it, I saw a lady in the store the other day using a rock to decide which product to buy. Jesus is our “go to” person for decisions. We get a lot more than “yes or no” answers too. He did away with sacred rocks because we have the revelation of His Word. We have a personal relationship with Him.

Imagine if you only said “yes” or “no” to your spouse. I know, some of you think that is true of your husband, but we men communicate in a lot more than words, and so does Jesus. When we focus our life on Jesus and His Word, our desires become His. We have a sense in our heart of what would please Him and what would not. The presence of His Holy Spirit within nudges us in the right direction and sometimes slams doors shut or swings it open through circumstance. It’s so much better than a stony “yes” or “no” answer.

I think that many times, I’ve been too determined to hear a voice within. I’m not denying that there is a still small voice, but it often comes in expressions other than words. Are you open to all the ways that He would speak to you? The supreme way is His word. That is the main source by which we get to know Him. Look at how He’s spoken to us in the clothing of the High Priest.

I’m so thankful I live in a day where the answer isn’t in stones in my front pocket, but living in my heart. Hebrews 8:1-2 (ESV) <sup>1</sup> *Now the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven,* <sup>2</sup> *a minister in the holy places, in the true tent that the Lord set up, not man.*

Thank God for sending us the Great High Priest, glorious, holy, beautiful! He brings us near to God, consecrates us with His presence in us and is the sacrifice for us. He makes us what He intended for the nation of Israel, a kingdom of priests that draw near to God. (1Peter 2:9; Hebrews 10:22)

#### Questions

- 1 What does the phrase “bring near” mean?
- 2 Why were the sacred vestments necessary? What about today?
- 3 Describe the ephod and the breastpiece?
- 4 How were the Urim and Thummim used?

#### Commented [Paul23]: 1 Peter 2:9 (ESV)

<sup>9</sup> But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

#### Commented [Paul24]: Hebrews 10:22 (ESV)

<sup>22</sup> let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

- 5 How did God describe the function of the clothes?
- 6 In what way does Jesus fulfill the pictures in the priest's clothing?
- 7 Are you wearing those clothes?
- 8 How does Jesus fulfill the function of the clothes?
- 9 Why don't we need the Urim and Thummim?