

The Book of Exodus

Lesson 19

Chapters 28:2 - 43

The Priests Garments

Exodus 28: 2 **"And you shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother, for glory and for beauty. ³ "And you shall speak to all the skillful persons whom I have endowed with the spirit of wisdom, that they make Aaron's garments to consecrate him, that he may minister as priest to Me.**

Although the LORD has not completed giving Moses the details of the furniture for the Tabernacle, He pauses to put in place the leaders of His worship and their proper dress before He proceeds with the furniture. Moses was to **"make holy garments for Aaron."** The word **"holy"** in this instance means *sacred*. The word means *to be used exclusively for one purpose*. In this case, the purpose was to be for the worship of the LORD.

The garments were to be for **"glory and for beauty."** In the last few chapters we learned that when the Ark of the Covenant (Testimony) and the Mercy Seat were completed and dedicated in the Tabernacle, the "glory" of the LORD would then rest between the two cherubim on the Mercy Seat. The garments of the priest were to be created as the proper attire to be worn when approaching the glory of the LORD. The garments were also to be for the "beauty" of the LORD. There is a beauty in the holiness of the LORD and all that pertains to Him. **Psalm 96:9** says "Oh, worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness!" (New King James Version) In this passage, the LORD is expressing His intent that those who stand before Him should do so in beautiful attire, the best they possess. It should be the clothing that is set aside for the purpose of approaching the LORD, not the everyday life. They were not the common, not the dirty, not the mundane, but the special, the *Sunday Best* as we might say. These priestly garments were not to be worn out and about everyday, but on the occasions of entering into the LORD's presence and on those days when the priests were among the people for holy purposes. One such purpose was when the LORD decided to move the camp. In those days, the Tabernacle was taken apart, covered in waterproof skins and carried by the priests and Levites in a holy parade lead by the priests in their holy garments.

The LORD has already prepared people in the camp who were **"endowed with the spirit of wisdom, that they make Aaron's garments."** The LORD always has the right people in place to do the jobs He has planned. This time of building the Tabernacle, its furniture, utensils and the garments for the priests was not a surprise to the LORD; He knew about this need before He created the heavens and the earth. In Egypt, men and women were born who would be endowed by the LORD to be craftsmen ready and able to complete the work of the LORD in this setting. In those years in Egypt they might have never known their purpose in life. They might have felt helpless, worthless, unneeded, valueless, or insignificant for years. They were possibly beaten by their Egyptian masters to work faster, better, longer! But now, the reason for their birth has come to fruition. They were craftsmen, prepared by the Holy Spirit with the wisdom to know

how to replicate on earth that which the LORD showed Moses on the mountain – the holy, sacred garments.

What was the purpose of the garments? The LORD says they were to “**consecrate him, that he may minister as priest to Me.**” To “consecrate him” means to set Aaron aside for a special purpose, a specific job, a holy duty – for life in the case of Aaron.

The Priests Garments

Exodus 28:4 **"And these are the garments which they shall make: a breastpiece and an ephod and a robe and a tunic of checkered work, a turban and a sash, and they shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother and his sons, that he may minister as priest to Me. ⁵ "And they shall take the gold and the blue and the purple and the scarlet *material* and the fine linen.**

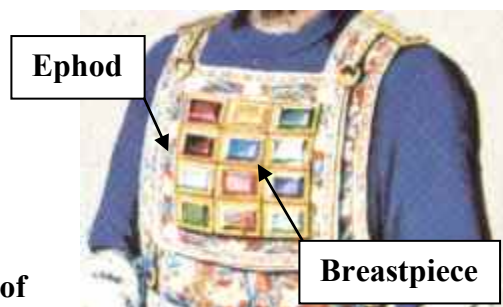
The garments of Aaron and his sons will include the following:

1. Breastpiece
2. Ephod
3. Robe
4. Tunic
5. Turban
6. Sash

As far as what these six items looked like, we are helpless. Long have they been gone, perhaps since the destruction of the Temple by Titus in 70 AD. Nevertheless, thankful to Josephus (Born 30 AD in Jerusalem, died 100 AD in Rome), a Jewish historian of the first century writing for the Romans, we have written descriptions of the various items which he had the privilege of seeing. In some cases, we will defer to his work for clarity.

The Priests Ephod

Exodus 28:6 **"They shall also make the ephod of gold, of blue and purple *and* scarlet *material* and fine twisted linen, the work of the skillful workman. ⁷ "It shall have two shoulder pieces joined to its two ends, that it may be joined. ⁸ "And the skillfully woven band, which is on it, shall be like its workmanship, of the same material: of gold, of blue and purple and scarlet *material* and fine twisted linen. ⁹ "And you shall take two onyx stones and engrave on them the names of the sons of Israel, ¹⁰ six of their names on the one stone, and the names of the remaining six on the other stone, according to their birth. ¹¹ "As a jeweler engraves a signet, you shall engrave the two stones according to the names of the sons of Israel; you shall set them in filigree *settings* of gold. ¹² "And you shall put the two stones on the shoulder pieces of the ephod, *as* stones of memorial for the sons of Israel, and Aaron shall bear their names before**



The Ephod and the Breastpiece

the LORD on his two shoulders for a memorial. ¹³ "And you shall make filigree settings of gold, ¹⁴ and two chains of pure gold; you shall make them of twisted cordage work, and you shall put the corded chains on the filigree settings.

We might best think of the ephod as an embroidered apron. We see the mention of the two shoulder pieces and think it odd that they would be so specifically detailed in the description yet, in that day, nothing had been created to be worn as such in any nation. Today, we see such designs on every corner and avenue, especially in the warmer months in the southern states of America. Not so in the wilderness of Sinai or by the waters of the Nile from where this cast of characters had just departed.

We notice that each shoulder strap was to have an onyx stone in a **"filigree setting of gold."** The word "filigree" means a woven network. In this case, it means a woven network of gold strands. We would call it a gold mesh setting, a casing as it would be for the stone to be secured.



Example: Silver Filigree Ring With Stone

The names of the 12 tribes would be inscribed on the two stones, six on one and six on the other. We must pause to ask, "Which set of 12 names were placed on the stones?"

Was it the 12 sons of Jacob which included Joseph and Levi or was it the list of the 12 tribes that removed Joseph's and Levi's name and added the sons of Joseph as Manasseh and Ephraim instead? Those tribes were already established before they departed Egypt. We do not know that answer. Nevertheless, six names were on one side and six were on the other.

Strands of gold were twisted into a cord that was used to hold the ephod the onyx stones on the shoulder pieces.

The Priests Breastpiece

Exodus 28:15 **"And you shall make a breastpiece of judgment, the work of a skillful workman; like the work of the ephod you shall make it: of gold, of blue and purple and scarlet material and fine twisted linen you shall make it. ¹⁶ "It shall be square and folded double, a span in length and a span in width.**

¹⁷ **"And you shall mount on it four rows of stones; the first row shall be a row of ruby, topaz and emerald; ¹⁸ and the second row a turquoise, a sapphire and a diamond; ¹⁹ and the third row a jacinth, an agate and an amethyst; ²⁰ and the fourth row a beryl and an onyx and a jasper; they shall be set in gold filigree. ²¹ "And the stones shall be according to the names of the sons of Israel: twelve, according to their names; they shall be like the engravings of a seal, each according to his name for the twelve tribes. ²² "And you shall make on the breastpiece chains of twisted cordage work in pure gold. ²³ "And you shall make on the breastpiece two rings of gold, and shall put the two rings on the two ends of the breastpiece. ²⁴ "And you shall put the two cords of gold on the two rings at the ends of the breastpiece.**



Breastpiece attached to the Ephod

²⁵ "And you shall put the *other* two ends of the two cords on the two filigree *settings*, and put them on the shoulder pieces of the ephod, at the front of it. ²⁶ "And you shall make two rings of gold and shall place them on the two ends of the breastpiece, on the edge of it, which is toward the inner side of the ephod. ²⁷ "And you shall make two rings of gold and put them on the bottom of the two shoulder pieces of the ephod, on the front of it close to the place where it is joined, above the skillfully woven band of the ephod. ²⁸ "And they shall bind the breastpiece by its rings to the rings of the ephod with a blue cord, that it may be on the skillfully woven band of the ephod, and that the breastpiece may not come loose from the ephod. ²⁹ "And Aaron shall carry the names of the sons of Israel in the breastpiece of judgment over his heart when he enters the holy place, for a memorial before the LORD continually.



Breastpiece attached to the Ephod

The Breastplate was permanently attached to the Ephod apron with gold rings and golden chords. On the Breastplate twelve precious stones were placed, one for each tribe. Each stone was held in a gold-wire filigree in the same manner that the two onyx stones were constructed that were placed on the shoulder pieces of the Ephod. Each stone in order represented a specific tribe. For instance, the first stone mentioned was the ruby and it represented Reuben, the first born of Jacob. The second was a topaz for Simeon and the third was an emerald for Levi completing the first row and giving honor to the first three sons of Jacob. Obviously, the ruby is red, the topaz is yellow and the emerald is green as seen in the picture provided. It must be mentioned here that the interpretation of the placement of the stones as represented in the picture has been westernized and is completely wrong. The ruby is placed on the left side because in the western nations of the world most items, including the written language, align the edges from the left to the right. This is not the case in the eastern world where items and the written word are aligned from right to left. For example, Exodus 28:17 in the Hebrew is written as follows with the first word of the verse on the far right.

ורים אבן טור אדם פטדה וברקת הטור האחד: ומלאת בו מלאת אבן ארבעה ט

In the same manner, the stones would have been placed on the Breastplate with Reuben's ruby on the far right and Levi's emerald on the far left. This placement would allow the Hebrew reader to see the names of the sons of Israel written on stones in the correct birth order.

The placement of the Breastplate was important. It lay directly over the heart of the priest "**for a memorial.**" A memorial is a constant reminder. In this case, the Breastplate was a constant reminder of the original twelve sons of Jacob/Israel who were the original heads of the twelve tribes. Even though Jacob/Israel was the father, each tribe would record their genealogical heritage to the tribal head as will be clearly evident as the record in God's Word continues.

The Breastplate is also called in the Scripture "**the breastpiece of judgment.**" The reason for that name concerns the Urim and Thummin that were placed in the middle of the the Breastplate directly over the heart of the priest.

The Priests Urim and Thummim

Exodus 28:30

"And you shall put in the breastpiece of judgment the Urim and the Thummim, and they shall be over Aaron's heart when he goes in before the LORD; and Aaron shall carry the judgment of the sons of Israel over his heart before the LORD continually.

No one alive on earth knows the precise meaning of the **"Urim and the Thummin."** We do not know if they were stones or simply the words written in gold thread on the Breastplate. Speculation abounds as to the meaning of the words. Some say they mean *Lights and Perfections*. Others say they mean *Yes or No*. Adam Clark's Commentary says the following about them.

1. They are nowhere described.
2. There is no direction given to Moses or any other how to make them.
3. Whatever they were, they do not appear to have been made on this occasion.
4. If they were the work of man at all, they must have been the articles in the ancient tabernacle, matters used by the patriarchs, and not here particularly described, because they were well known.
5. It is probable that nothing material is designed. This is the opinion of some of the Jewish doctors. Rabbi Menachem on this chapter says, "The Urim and Thummim were not the work of the artificer; neither had the artificers or the congregation of Israel in them any work or any voluntary offering; but they were a mystery delivered to Moses from the mouth of God, or they were the work of God himself, or a measure of the Holy Spirit."
6. That God was often consulted by Urim and Thummim, is sufficiently evident from several scriptures; but how or in what manner he was thus consulted appears in none.
7. This mode of consultation, whatever it was, does not appear to have been in use from the consecration of Solomon's temple to the time of its destruction; and after its destruction it is never once mentioned. Hence the Jews say that the five following things, which were in the first temple, were wanting in the second:
 - a. "The ark with the mercy-seat and cherubim;
 - b. The fire which came down from heaven;
 - c. The *shechinah* or Divine presence;
 - d. The Holy Spirit, i.e., the gift of prophecy; and
 - e. The Urim and Thummim."

Thus, how they worked and how they delivered judgment upon the nation of Israel cannot be determined. They are a mystery to us although they were very real and present in the days of

Moses, the Sinai journey and continued to give the LORD's divine leadership until the destruction of the Temple by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BC.

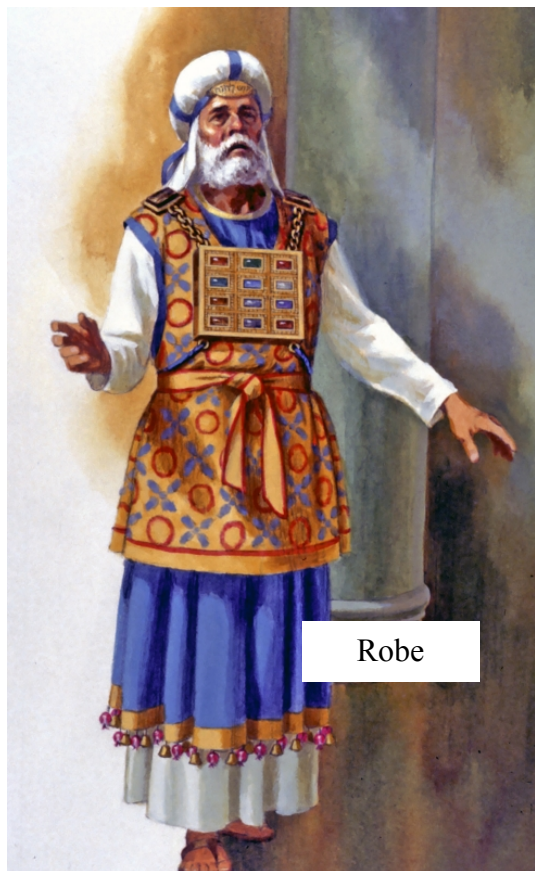
The Priests Robe

Exodus 28:31 " And you shall make the robe of the ephod all of blue.³² "And there shall be an opening at its top in the middle of it; around its opening there shall be a binding of woven work, as *it were* the opening of a coat of mail, that it may not be torn.³³ "And you shall make on its hem pomegranates of blue and purple and scarlet *material*, all around on its hem, and bells of gold between them all around:³⁴ a golden bell and a pomegranate, a golden bell and a pomegranate, all around on the hem of the robe.³⁵ "And it shall be on Aaron when he ministers; and its tinkling may be heard when he enters and leaves the holy place before the LORD, that he may not die.

The blue robe was worn under the Breastplate and the Ephod. It was not the first piece of clothing that was put on when preparing to enter the Tabernacle for the priestly service, that was the Linen Breeches which will be described later. The robe was the second garment to be put on. The neckline was reinforced with a mesh to would prevent a tear. At the bottom of the robe golden bells and pomegranates alternated around its edge. At every movement of the priest, the bells would make a "tinkling" sound. Specifically, the sound of the bells were heard as he entered and departed the

Tabernacle. It is quite possible that because of the construction of the Tabernacle, the sound of the bells could not be heard while the priest was inside the Holy Place.

It is interesting that the Scripture places an importance on the sound of the bells. In this case, the sounds of the bells were heard as the priest entered and departed the Tabernacle. Even in the eastern worlds today, emperors are often hidden in a palace and their proclamations are sent out to their nations by means of curriers and servants. In this case, the LORD rested on the Mercy Seat in the Holy of Holies. Curtains, not solid walls or doors separated the interior from the camp grounds. Anyone would have come and gone at will with no struggle. The bells on the bottom of the robe were the protection for the priest from the wrath of the LORD within the Tabernacle. Obviously, the all-knowing LORD was aware when the priest came and went from the Tabernacle. The bells were not a warning to the LORD of the priest entrance, they were a

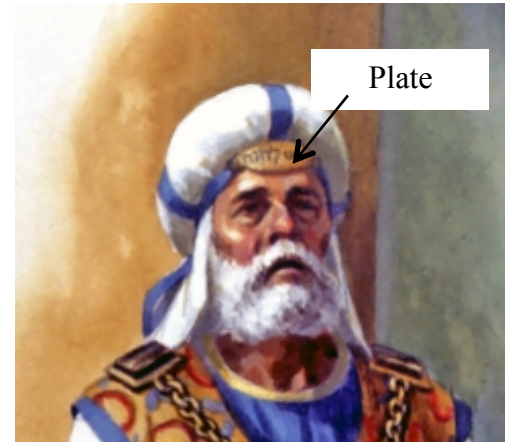


Aaron's Blue Robe

warning to the people that only the priest, wearing the robe with the bells, was allowed within its curtain walls. Anyone entering without wearing the robe would die. It might be understood intrinsically, but should be mentioned here, the robe was an audible sign to the people that the priest was moving within the Tabernacle in the operation of his service but anyone who was not consecrated as a priest who donned the robe would not be permitted to enter the Tabernacle without dying.

The Priests Plate

Exodus 28:36 **"You shall also make a plate of pure gold and shall engrave on it, like the engravings of a seal, 'Holy to the LORD.'**
³⁷ **"And you shall fasten it on a blue cord, and it shall be on the turban; it shall be at the front of the turban. ³⁸ "And it shall be on Aaron's forehead, and Aaron shall take away the iniquity of the holy things which the sons of Israel consecrate, with regard to all their holy gifts; and it shall always be on his forehead, that they may be accepted before the LORD.**



Priests Plate and Tunic

On the forehead of the priest, a plate was worn that said **"Holy to the LORD."** This plate represented a change in the items crafted by the workmen that they could not fashion – holiness. Sinful hands crafted the Tabernacle, its furnishings and the priestly garments. It took the LORD to make those items holy and acceptable to Him. The plate was a constant reminder to the people when they saw the priest of the purpose of all that was made for the worship of the LORD. Even Aaron was sinful. The plate did not take away his sin. Yet, when he placed the plate on his forehead, tied with a blue cord, he was reminded each day that the work he was about to do was to be holy in every way!

The Priests Tunic

Exodus 28:39 **"And you shall weave the tunic of checkered work of fine linen, and shall make a turban of fine linen, and you shall make a sash, the work of a weaver.**
⁴⁰ **"And for Aaron's sons you shall make tunics; you shall also make sashes for them, and you shall make caps for them, for glory and for beauty. ⁴¹ "And you shall put them on Aaron your brother and on his sons with him; and you shall anoint them and ordain them and consecrate them, that they may serve Me as priests.**

Today, with the advent of media and the spread of various religions into the entire world, the tunic is not a rare sight as has been the case in America in the past. The tunic was a long scarf used to wrap the head and hair. In the case of the priest, thin sashes were added to adorn the tunic and also help hold it in place as indicated in the picture above. As with the other parts of the priestly garments, they were **"for glory and beauty."** (The glory of the LORD and the beauty of

His holiness!) Aaron and his sons were to all have these tunics. As ordained and consecrated priest, they would have worn a tunic at all times when they were in public as a sign of their position.

The Priests Linen Breeches

Exodus 28:42 **"And you shall make for them linen breeches to cover *their* bare flesh; they shall reach from the loins even to the thighs. ⁴³ "And they shall be on Aaron and on his sons when they enter the tent of meeting, or when they approach the altar to minister in the holy place, so that they do not incur guilt and die. It *shall be* a statute forever to him and to his descendants after him.**

The first garment donned by the priest in preparing to enter the service of the LORD in the Tabernacle was the linen breeches. According to Josephus in conjunction with this passage the breeches covered all the bare skin that was not covered by the robe, ephod, or tunic. It reached to the ankles and down the arms to the wrists. The linen represented purity when approaching the service of the LORD. This garment was evidently purposefully introduced by the LORD in stark opposition to the methods and garments used in pagan worship around the world at the time. In many pagan religions, the priest does his business naked or in loin cloth in sensual, sexual and even deadly acts in worship before his gods. Such actions incur guilt! Not so for the priest of the high God; he shall do his business in the pure glory of the LORD and the beauty of His holiness.



Breeches

Aaron's White Linen Breeches