



# Exodus – Lesson 20

## The Consecration of the Priests – Part 1

### Read Exodus 28:1-43

1. (a) According to Exodus 28:2, why were Aaron and his sons to be outfitted with special *garments*?

The special garments that the priests would wear would have three purposes: 1) they would be *“holy.”* The garments would set the priests apart to a holy service to a holy God, a service that was unique and special. Not just “anyone” could serve as a priest, and the service the priests would undertake would be holy. The term *“holy”* also implies that the service of the priests would produce a holiness amongst the *people* by virtue of their various rituals. The sacrifices would *atone* for the people and bring them to a state of holiness. 2) They would be *“for glory.”* The garments of the priests would signify that they were to bring glory and honor to God. By leading in worship, the priests would bring the people to a place where they would bring glory and honor to God through the sacrifices and the worship that they offered. 3) They would be *“for beauty.”* The garments would be specially made as beautiful and, when viewed by the people, would remind them of the beauty and majesty of God. The combination of holy, glory, and beauty is an apt description of God himself, and these robes would remind the people of the holiness, glory, and beauty of God each time the priests went to work.

- (b) From vv. 4-5, name and briefly describe each of the *elements* of the garments of the priests.

The garments of the priests were made up of the following items: 1) a breastplate (vv. 15-30), a golden plate to be worn over the chest, embedded with stones; 2) an ephod (vv. 6-14), a multi-colored linen apron; 3) a robe (vv. 31-35), an all-blue, sleeveless garment with tassels and bells on its hem; 4) a coat (v. 39), a checker-work of fine linen; 5) a turban (vv. 36-38), fitted with a golden plate engraved “Holy to the Lord” to be worn on the head; and 6) a sash (v. 40), to tie the entire ensemble together.

- (c) Compare Exodus 28:3 to 1 Corinthians 12:1-11. What work of the *Holy Spirit* was essential to these garments? Why does God uniquely gift men to do *this* particular work?

The garments were to be made by skillful people who had been *“filled with the spirit of skill.”* God wanted these garments made by people who were *gifted* by the Holy Spirit; they were not to be made by just anyone, but only by those whom God had purposely gifted to do the work. This is an *Old Testament* example of “spiritual gifts,” a special gifting by God of those who will serve him and do his will. This is what is spoken of in 1 Corinthians 12, the special gifts imparted to believers by the Holy Spirit to do the work of God in the world. But, in this case, the gifts were given for *this particular work* because the robes of the priests would symbolize their *holiness* before God, their *position* before God and the people, and their *importance* as both ambassadors of holiness and instruments of righteousness. The garments represented something great (see 1a above), and only “certain” men could be trusted to make them.

(d) List some ways that this gift of the Spirit is important in the life of the *church* today?

It is essential to the life of the church that God should provide such gifting, since human beings do not possess the natural abilities to do the “supernatural” work of God. Such gifts include preaching and teaching, healing, spiritual miracles, helping, administration, and speaking in tongues. All of these are designed by God to further the spread of the gospel and to build up the body of Christ. This *particular* gift (i.e. craftsmanship, the ability to create unique and spiritually useful things) is important today in all of those who work to help maintain the *physical* church. Because the church today requires a physical presence, it also requires men who are gifted in the *building* and *maintenance* of facilities. Although the making of “robes” is no longer necessary (i.e. since Christ has completed the work of redemption and ministers no longer act as priests), it is still important for men to be able to work with their hands to minister to the physical needs of the church and its properties.

2. (a) From Exodus 28:6-14, briefly describe the *ephod* that Aaron would wear. What is significant about its colors?

The ephod was a robe that would be made out of linen and blue, purple, and scarlet yarns, with gold woven into it, similar in nature to the tabernacle curtains and the veil (with the exception of the gold). It would have shoulder straps and the priest would put it on over his head. It would have a woven “band” made of the same material, probably used as a sash or belt. On the shoulder pieces, two “signet” stones bearing the names of the twelve tribes set in gold filigrees would be set. The signets would be secured by golden chains. Again, like the tabernacle curtains and the veil, the color of the robe would signify the holiness and presence of God, the royal nature of the place of God. The robes, worn during the various rituals of the priests, would signify the fact that the priests were serving the royal God.

(b) What was the purpose of the *signets* placed on the shoulder straps of the ephod (see vv. 9-12)?

The signets were used to “*bear the names [of the twelve tribes] before the Lord,*” to act as stones of “*remembrance.*” The stones would be used for God to “remember” the twelve tribes in the various rituals done in the tabernacle. The priests would represent the people before God and their names would be “visible” to God. This would be a symbol to the people that they were always “present” before the Lord and that they were constantly in God’s plans.

3. (a) From Exodus 28:15-30, briefly describe the *breastplate* that Aaron was to wear. What function did the 12 *stones* embedded in it perform?

The breastplate was to be made of the same material as the ephod, gold, purple, blue, and scarlet linens woven together. It was to be square, doubled over to produce a hollow pocket. Embedded in the front was to be twelve stones of various kinds placed in signets each representing a tribe of Israel and engraved with their names. The breastplate was to be attached to the ephod with two cords of gold connected to golden rings on it. A blue lace would hold the breastplate firmly to the ephod. The Urim and the Thummim were to be placed inside the breastplate (see 3b below). The twelve stones represent the twelve tribes of Israel, and served a similar purpose to the signet stones placed on the shoulder pieces of the ephod.

(b) What was the “*Urim and Thummim*” that was placed in the breastplate (see v. 30)?

No description of the Urim and Thummim is provided in this chapter, implying that they were well understood by the people at that point in time. The Hebrew words may imply something like “a perfect light,” suggesting to some that these were articles (i.e. stones) that could be used to “divine” answers to questions from God. In 1 Samuel 14:41, these objects were used by Saul to determine whether he was in the right, or whether he had sinned against God. Therefore, the *probable* use was for determining God’s will or God’s desires for any particular situation. Since the Urim and Thummim was limited to use by the priests, this would seem to make sense: the priests were designed by God as the *mediators* of the people before him. Thus, the use of these objects to determine God’s will would be well within the purview of their job description. How exactly this took place is unknown, but it is clear that the people understood it at this point.

(c) Why was the breastplate called a “*breastpiece of judgment*” (see vv. 15, 29)?

If the Urim and Thummim were indeed used to ascertain the will of God, to divine his purposes for the people, then the breastplate would be for judging the various circumstances of the people of Israel. The priests would act as mediators, bringing the needs of the people before the Lord; the Lord would judge between them and do as he deemed. However, another concept may be present here: the “judgment” of the Lord *might* be related to their sinfulness and God’s need to “judge” that sin. Since the priests would act in the place of the people before God in the sacrifices, the “judgment” of God would fall on the sacrificed animal instead of the people, the priest bringing that sacrifice to the Lord. Thus, a judgment would come and the people would be judged as guilty and then atoned for by the sacrifice. This would be the *primary* duty of the priests before the tabernacle, with the breastplate of judgment being “in front” of them at all times.

4. (a) Briefly describe the *robe* of Aaron, his *turban*, and his *coat* from Exodus 28:31-39.

The robe would be made of all blue yarn in a single piece with a head opening surrounded by a collar. The hem would have pomegranates made of blue, purple and scarlet yarn, with golden bells in between them. The bells would serve as a sound indicating that the high priest had not died when entering into the Holy of Holies. Aaron would also wear a turban (whose exact form is not mentioned other than its linen) with a golden plate attached to it bearing the words “Holy to the Lord” (or “Holy to Yahweh”; see 4b below). Aaron would also wear an outer coat made in a checkered pattern of fine linen complete with a sash embroidered with fine needlework.

(b) For what *purpose* did Aaron wear an engraved golden plate on his turban (see vv. 36-38)?

The golden plate, bearing the words “Holy to Yahweh” would serve as a reminder that Aaron was bringing gifts to God from sinful people and that they were now consecrated to God. Since no gift ever offered to God was perfect and holy, this plate would act as a “atonement” for the gifts, removing any stain of guilt that was present in them as they were brought before God. By being placed on the turban, the golden plate would be the first thing that God would “see” as Aaron came before him, reminding God that Aaron was coming to bring the sacrifice of the people before the Lord which would atone for their guilt.

5. Connect the commands of Exodus 28:42-43 to the *prohibition* of Exodus 20:26? Why would God require such *modesty*?

God required that the priests wear undergarments in order that their “nakedness” would not be exposed if they went up to the altar and then bent down. Such a thing would bring shame upon the process of offering to God a sacrifice. This is symbolically similar to the situation of Genesis 3: once Adam and Eve had sinned, they were “ashamed,” meaning that they now connected their nakedness to their sinfulness. Thus, they attempted to “cover” their guilt by covering their genitals. From that point on, exposed genitals became synonymous with a perception of guilt due to sin, and human beings have endowed with a modesty to cover their genitals in order to “cover” their sinfulness. The exposing of the genitals by the priests would expose a sinfulness in a holy place and before a holy God. Therefore, the wearing of undergarments would protect against this kind of exposure and prevent any degradation to the holy rituals the priests were performing.