
Clothed in Holiness, Glory and Beauty

The Priest's Garments

Exodus 28:1-43

Introduction Here in America, we have had a visit from the pope this past week. The leader of that false religion has been wildly feted by almost everyone. What has interested me, fashion maven that I am, is his attire. On official public occasions he is often dressed in magnificent, expensive robes and surplices. He has several miters which he wears as a symbol of his office. When he is away from the Vatican, he will usually have a shell on the outermost garment. In popery, this is the traditional symbol of being a pilgrim in the world. In some contrast is the regal simplicity of the Dali Lama. Here are two religious leaders whose external attire is meant in some way to convey the greatness and the grandness of who they are and what they do. And it is all of this world and none of heaven.



We have been on a pilgrimage as well. We have been slowly trekking through the book of Exodus. Now we come to a chapter about fashion, about the garments the priests were to wear.

Exodus is about God's deliverance of and dwelling with His people. We have seen the book show us the taking of God's people out of Egypt (1-15). We have watched as God worked in taking Egypt out of God's people (16-19). Now we are in the chapters about putting God into the midst of God's people (17-40).

In the immediate context God has been giving direction for the preparation of a worshipping people and the preparation of the worship system. That system includes four major elements: the furniture and utensils, the Tabernacle and grounds, the priests and their office and the sacrifices and their requirements.

After studying this chapter and writing this sermon I am ever more thankful for the simplicity and beauty of the New Covenant. While we want to be modest and inoffensive in our dress as we minister the Word to God's people, we are given such amazing freedom. But what we wear is of no significance. It does not point to something great and *it should not*. Modern calls for a return to the mysterium of candles, glass and priestly robes are a call back to the shadows of the Old Covenant and the darkness of Rome, Eastern Orthodoxy and medieval mysticism. Even as a preacher of the gospel, I do not dress in any special way that identifies me in my office. I stand or sit with the Word of God and the call of the church. I do not need vestments. I need truth. And having that, I have enough.

But the Old Covenant was a time of shadows, symbols and significance. Let us then with our Bibles open see the wonders of a future king and priest through the marvels of the priestly garments.



The Greater Glory of the High Priests Clothing (v.1-5)

“Then bring near to you Aaron your brother, and his sons with him, from among the people of Israel, to serve me as priests—Aaron and Aaron’s sons, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar. ² And you shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother, for glory and for beauty. ³ You shall speak to all the skillful, whom I have filled with a spirit of skill, that they make Aaron’s garments to consecrate him for my priesthood. ⁴ These are the garments that they shall make: a breastpiece, an ephod, a robe, a coat of checker work, a turban, and a sash. They shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother and his sons to serve me as priests. ⁵ They shall receive gold, blue and purple and scarlet yarns, and fine twined linen.

The People for Whom the Clothing is Made (v.1)

Up till this time, Moses had primarily served as the spokesman and the mediator between God and His people. He functioned as both prophet and priest. Once the Law was added, because of transgressions, then a change is made. Aaron and his sons and their sons would serve as the priests. Two of these sons had gone up with Aaron and Moses into the mountain with the seventy elders who saw God, were not destroyed and ate in His presence. They, along with their father, would now assume the priestly office arrayed in the priestly garments.

The Splendor of the Clothing (v.2-3a)

The garments for Aaron, the High Priest were to be special, consecrated, set apart exclusively for his use. They were to be holy, not in the sense of sinless, but in the sense of set apart from common use and set apart solely for their intended use. Further, these were not just to be utilitarian. They were not simply a set Levi’s just for Aaron’s use. They were to be made in such a way as to display the glory and beauty of the priesthood and that of God. While the clothing might not suit our western taste, their fabric, colors, gold embroidery, unusual and yet functional design would have been beautiful in the eyes of those who saw them. God intended for His priests to reflect in their garments the beauty of His glory.

Through His Spirit, God had given unusual skill to the crafts men who would be responsible for tailoring the High Priest’s clothing. General directions as to the materials, design and use still were insufficient to make these garments. Special skill from the hand of God through His Spirit would enable these tailors to create this marvelously glorious and beautiful garment.

The Purpose of the High Priest's Clothing (v.3b)

The skill given to the craftsman was because of the purpose of the High Priest’s garments. His clothing was to consecrate him. It was to mark him as set apart, sanctified to God and for God’s service. These special clothes made him distinct from the other priests and the people. The act of putting on these garments was to daily remind him of his special relationship to God and to God’s people.

This is why we do not believe in “clergy” robes, gowns, outfits, surplices, or any other special attire singling “clergy” out from God’s people. We are not priests. We are not High Priests. We do not in the church and to the church what the priests of the Old Covenant were. They alone mediated the revelation from God and the sacrifices to God. We do not. We do have a God ordained function in the church to shepherd the church. But vestments and all other forms of special

clergy clothing all reflect a priestly view of elders that is not right in the New Covenant. The great blessing of the New Covenant is a finished sacrifice, a full Word accessible and available to all and a completed and fulfilled priesthood located in Christ alone.

The Overview of the Pieces of the Clothing (v.4)

The articles of clothing are generally listed. They were to make a breastpiece, a tunic (Ephod), a robe, a coat a turban and a sash. Additional sets of priestly clothing were also to be made for the active serving priests. Aaron's sons were to be arrayed in the beauty and the glory as well.

The Connection to the Tabernacle (v.5)

The materials for the making of these garments were to be solicited and received as donations. Because of the materials that were given and the way they were made, these glorious and beautiful garments were very similar to the fine linen curtains that formed the interior walls of the Tabernacle.

So here is the greater glory of the High Priest's garments. Their beauty and glory is wrapped up in the holy incarnation and personal righteousness of Jesus Christ.

The Holy Beauty of the High Priests' Clothing (v.6-39)

The Ephod - The Jewels and Names (v.6-14)

⁶ And they shall make the ephod of gold, of blue and purple and scarlet yarns, and of fine twined linen, skillfully worked. ⁷ It shall have two shoulder pieces attached to its two edges, so that it may be joined together. ⁸ And the skillfully woven band on it shall be made like it and be of one piece with it, of gold, blue and purple and scarlet yarns, and fine twined 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 the one stone, and the names of the remaining six on the other stone, in the order of their birth. ¹¹ As a jeweler engraves signets, so shall you engrave the two stones with the names of the sons of Israel. You shall enclose them in settings of gold filigree. ¹² 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. 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.

The ephod was a fine linen tunic embroidered in gold and interwoven with blue, purple and scarlet thread. It would have looked much like the beautiful curtains that lined the interior of the Tabernacle. It was made of two large pieces, one for the front and one for the back. Two pieces, one draped over each shoulder joined the front and back. A decorative sash went around the waist of the High Priest.

Two onyx stones were to be engraved with the names of the tribes of Israel, six on one and six on the other appearing in their birth order. A filigree gold setting was to be created as a base for the stones. This was then sewn to each shoulder by a cord made of braided pure gold thread. These were to be a constant reminder of God's people whenever the High Priest served before the Lord. He came as their representative; he was before the Lord on their behalf.

The Breastpiece - The Stones of Judgment (v.15-30)

¹⁵ "You shall make a breastpiece of judgment, in skilled work. In the style of the ephod you shall make it—of gold, blue and purple and scarlet yarns, and fine twined linen shall you make it. ¹⁶ It shall be square and doubled, a span its length and a span its breadth. ¹⁷ You shall set in it four rows of stones. A row of sardius, topaz, and carbuncle shall be the first row; ¹⁸ and the second row an emerald, a sapphire, and a diamond; 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 their names according 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 twisted chains like cords, of pure gold. 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 And 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 of filigree, 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 And 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 seam 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 lace of blue, so that it may lie on the skillfully woven band of the ephod, 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 judgment on his heart, when he goes into the Holy Place, to bring them to regular remembrance before the LORD. ³⁰ 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.

Attached to the front of the ephod was the breastpiece. This was used in judgment or in making decisions for the nation. This might sound a bit like a plate of armor, but it was not. It was cloth, a bit wider than a man's hand that was twice and as tall as wide and doubled over at the bottom to make a square pouch (see verse 30 – the Urim and Thummim were carried inside the breastpiece). In a dazzling display of beauty, four rows of gemstones with three in each row were attached to the outside. On each stone was to be engraved the name of a tribe of Israel and set in a filigree setting of gold.

While we do not know exactly our modern equivalent of some of these stones, we do know that they decorated the fallen anointed cherub who was in the mountain of God and was found (discovered) in the Garden of Eden (Ezekiel 28:12-15). This cluster of gemstones are spoken of as decorating the foundations of God's city (Revelation 21:19-20). It may well be the reference to these stones in those strategic texts show us that God's plan for redemption is being carried out. The fall with Satan in the Garden, the High Priest before the Lord with God's people's names inscribed on the same set of stones and the foundation of God's holy city, the church, decorated with these stones ties together in an dazzling beauty the storyline of redemption.

The breastpiece had a gold ring sewn onto each of its four corners. A gold braided chain was looped through the filigree mounting on the shoulders of the ephod and through the top rings of the breastpiece. In essence, the breastpiece hung from these golden chains. Through the bottom two rings were strung blue cords with one end sewn to the ephod and the other end tied to the sash around the High Priest's waist.

Into the breastpiece were placed objects which are called the Urim and the Thummim. We do not know what these were. The Bible does not ever record what they were, only how they were occasionally used. Several times in the Old Testament, leaders in Israel would consult with the High Priest about important decisions they faced on behalf of the nation.ⁱ The answer to their questions was given through the Urim and Thummim (Leviticus 8:8; 16:8; Numbers 27; 1 Samuel 28:6; 30:1-8; Nehemiah 7:65 || Ezra 2:63). It must be enough for us to simply say that God gave them a means to know His will through the High Priest. It is speculative at best to try to deduce from them a principle of guidance that functions for us. The fact that we do not have anything like them may be the point. Now, we have the objective Word of God and the wisdom God promises to grant to single-minded prayers asking for it (James 1:5-8). God will give the wisdom for decisions if we but ask Him, rely on Him, believe that we will have it and act upon the wisdom He grants.

In verses 29 and 30, the breastpiece was to be “over the heart” of the High Priest. This signified that the High Priest was to have Israel’s interests and concerns as his focus while ministering in the Tabernacle. He was there in the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies on their behalf. Our great high priest, the Lord Jesus, came in a fully human body, now glorified, and sits on the mercy seat, the throne in heaven. He knows our struggles from personal experience. He is there at God’s right hand to intercede and to represent us. Now, do not think of this as an adversarial intercession. Do not think of Jesus as pleading with God the Father to persuade Him to do what He is not inclined to do. No, a thousand times no. Think of Jesus simply presenting Himself as the argument with the Father rejoicing to respond with what He has determined already to do. We are over Jesus’ heart because we are in God’s plans and purposes.

The Garments - The Fine Beauty of Outerwear (v.31-39)

Two additional garments were to be worn by the High Priest. These were a robe and a turban.

The Robe - The Blue of Heaven and Bells (v.31-35)

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 around the opening, like the opening in a garment, so that it may not tear. ³³ On its hem you shall make pomegranates of blue and purple and scarlet yarns, around its hem, with bells of gold between them, ³⁴ a golden bell and a pomegranate, a golden bell and a pomegranate, around the hem of the robe. ³⁵ 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.

A solid blue (or possibly, violet) robe reaching past the knees was to be worn under the ephod. It was one piece of cloth with a hole or collar cut to slip it over the head like a poncho. The collar was to have a woven binding so that it might not tear as it was put on. Sewn around the hem of the robe were alternating bells and multi-colored balls of yarn in the shape of pomegranates. Any time the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies, he was to wear this garment. It appears that this was not worn at his other duties. The point was that as he entered the Holy of Holies, the people would know by the tinkling sound of the bells that he was alive and their sacrifice had been accepted.

The Turban - The Signet of Gold and Holiness(v.36-39)

³⁶ "You shall make a plate of pure gold and engrave on it, like the engraving of a signet, 'Holy to the LORD.' ³⁷ And you shall fasten it on the turban by a cord of blue. It shall be on the front of the turban. ³⁸ It shall be on Aaron's forehead, and Aaron shall bear any guilt from the holy things that the people of Israel consecrate as their holy gifts. It shall regularly be on his forehead, that they may be accepted before the LORD. ³⁹ "You shall weave the coat in checker work of fine linen, and you shall make a turban of fine linen, and you shall make a sash embroidered with needlework.

The final pieces of attire for the High Priest included a small shield or medallion, a turban to attach it to and a checkered linen coat. It seems that the coat was worn when outside to protect from the weather. The turban was made of linen. It was a wrapped turban much as you would see in the Middle East today. It was not the *miter* that you see the pope wear or is often portrayed in drawings of the High Priest. It primarily served to hold the medallion. The medallion was made of pure gold and had the words, "Holy to the Lord" engraved on it. It was to be attached by a blue cord to the front of the turban so that the medallion hung over the High Priest's forehead. It had to be worn at all times when he ministered for the people. It was to be a visible reminder to the people and to himself that the purpose of his ministry was to present God's people as holy to the Lord.

Christ is made to us our holiness. On our forehead is His very own name (Revelation 22:4). The anti-Christ substitutes his own identity on the forehead of his followers with the name or number of the beast. But just as the High Priest bore the names of God's people before God with "Holiness to the Lord" as a gold medallion on his forehead, so God has written our names in the Lamb's book of life and we bear Jesus' holy name on our foreheads identifying that we are His, His holy people.

The Lesser Glory of the Ordinary Priests' Garments(v.40-43)

In this closing paragraph, God give the instructions for the garments worn by the ordinary priests. While modeled on the High Priest's attire, theirs is clearly of a lesser glory and significance.

⁴⁰ "For Aaron's sons you shall make coats and sashes and caps. You shall make them for glory and beauty. ⁴¹ And you shall put them on Aaron your brother, and on his sons with him, and shall anoint them and ordain them and consecrate them 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 and they shall be on Aaron and on his sons when they go into the tent of meeting or when they come near the altar to minister in the Holy Place, lest they bear guilt and die. This shall be a statute forever for him and for his offspring after him.

The Identity of the Priests

(v.40)

The garments referred to here are for Aaron's sons. They will serve as ordinary priests, carrying out the duties of the Levitical system. Yet, while their clothing is different from the High Priest's, it is still made for glory and beauty. Remember this phrase from the beginning of this chapter? All God's priests will be attired, each in its own way, with glory and beauty.

The Ordination of the Priests

(v.41)

The High Priest was responsible to ordain and consecrate the ordinary priests. It was not by popular vote. It was by priestly choice and ordination. He was first to clothe them, then to set them in their office and anoint them with oil. How this was to be actually carried out is the subject of the next chapter.

The Propriety of the Priests

(v.42-43)

In what might seem odd to us, the final instruction is in the making and wearing of the underwear. These linen garments were simply thigh length boxers. Why? They are to wear these for modesty and cleanliness. Pagan priests tended to be naked under their garments, partially because so many of their rituals involved sex acts. The priests of the Lord were to be different. Even in the hardest labors associated with their priestly ministry, they were to be modest. From all their garments, their work was to be holy even down to the practical aspect of modesty.

Conclusion What is the significance of these clothes?

In their direct connection by design, material and style to the Tabernacle, they point to the Lord being clothed in flesh. The metaphor of Christ being among us as a tabernacle is now the metaphor of Christ being enrobed in human flesh.

In the fine linen that they are made of, they point to the robe of righteousness that Christ grants to His people. The church are spoken of as being robed in white linen. That white linen is the righteousness of Christ.

The stones on the shoulder and the stones on breastplate all speak of Christ our High Priest who bears us before the throne of God and has our interests at heart. His gracious work from the throne of mercy grants us access to God. We have a present access through worship and prayer while living before the face of God. We will have a final and full access when we will stand with praise swelling hearts before that very throne.

Let me remind you of a very important Biblical fact. Jesus came in the family of Judah. He was born in the royal line. So how then can He be the priest if He was not born in Aaron's family? Because Jesus does not serve under the Law in the Aaronic priesthood. He is a priest after the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 4:14-5:10). The priestly order of Aaron pointed to Christ and was fulfilled and brought to completion by Christ, but He is not in its order. Thus, Jesus is born in the tribe of Judah in the line from King David, but He serves as our great high priest appointed by God whose Temple we are in heaven.

Aaron's priesthood and sacrifices were never able to bring us forgiveness from sin or access to God. This tells us what the great problem of man is. It is not our lack of significance, our low self-esteem or bad self-images. Our problem is not that we are not self-actualized or do not have our next best life. Our great problem is our sin against God and our separation from God. This is what Aaron's priesthood teaches us: we are sinners against God and we are separated from God. Since our sin separates us from God it makes us subject to the judgment of God. We will stand one day

before the Lord Jesus Christ who will be our judge. So God has provided the Redeemer who has come, has died for our sins, was raised for our justification and is now mediating our access to God. This is the gospel. Nothing else. This is what you must believe and the One before whom you must bow. Will you today?

Listen then to the author of Hebrews who shows us the priesthood of Christ and His glorious, holy and beautiful ministry for us. [Hebrews 4:14-5:10, NLT]

So then, since we have a great High Priest who has entered heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to what we believe. This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin. So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most.

Every high priest is a man chosen to represent other people in their dealings with God. He presents their gifts to God and offers sacrifices for their sins. And he is able to deal gently with ignorant and wayward people because he himself is subject to the same weaknesses. That is why he must offer sacrifices for his own sins as well as theirs.

And no one can become a high priest simply because he wants such an honor. He must be called by God for this work, just as Aaron was. That is why Christ did not honor himself by assuming he could become High Priest. No, he was chosen by God, who said to him,

“You are my Son. Today I have become your Father.” And in another passage God said to him, “You are a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek.”

While Jesus was here on earth, he offered prayers and pleadings, with a loud cry and tears, to the one who could rescue him from death. And God heard his prayers because of his deep reverence for God. Even though Jesus was God’s Son, he learned obedience from the things he suffered. In this way, God qualified him as a perfect High Priest, and he became the source of eternal salvation for all those who obey him. And God designated him to be a High Priest in the order of Melchizedek.

End Notes

ⁱ What do we learn from these examples? On the basis of the Biblical evidence, the Jewish scholar Umberto Cassuto has written an excellent summary of the way the Urim and Thummim were used. According to Cassuto, we know:

- 1) That permission to inquire of the Lord through the priest by means of the Urim and Thummim in the pouch of the ephod was granted only to the person standing at the head of the people and only on matters of public concern;
- 2) That the inquiry related to matters that human beings could not possibly know, for instance an issue dependent on the conscience of an individual or something belonging to the future;
- 3) That the question had to be so formulated as to make only one of two answers possible: yes or no; the first matter or the second;
- 4) That two or more inquiries could not be made simultaneously; the answer was given to one question only;
- 5) That the reply was given by lot, as the expressions “casting” and “taking” indicate; this was based on the belief that the lot was not a matter of chance, but that God made his “judgement” known thereby, namely, His decision or verdict.