

A Perfect Representative

Exodus 28

We continue our series in Exodus this morning. We are in chapters 25-31 and Moses is up on Mount Sinai receiving detailed instructions from God about an earthly sanctuary that the people were to build so that God could come and dwell in their midst. He didn't want to dwell far off on a mountain somewhere, he wanted to dwell in the middle of the Israelite camp so that they could experience his glory and partake in his favor and blessing. So last week we saw God's instructions about how the tabernacle and all the objects inside were to be built and positioned. We also saw in Hebrews that all these things were copies or shadows of the heavenly throne of God and the redemptive work of Christ.

This week I want to look at chapter 28, which is where God gave Moses instructions for what the high priest was to wear. You might have read this chapter before and been confused with all the details, but I'm hoping that after today you will see the significance of what's going on. The high priest had an extremely important role in the community and by looking at what he wore we are going to see what that was.

It was amazing that God wanted to dwell in the midst of his people, but there was also major problem with that. When God descended on Mt. Sinai, the people got a taste of his glory and it was terrifying. It was obvious that if they drew near to the presence of Yahweh, they would die. They would die because of his holiness and their sinfulness. I don't quite understand it, but the Bible is very clear that God's holiness and our sinfulness are incompatible. Sinful humans cannot exist in the presence of a holy God.

But that's what the Israelites were. So how was Yahweh supposed to come and dwell in their midst? How were they supposed to worship him and enjoy his blessings if they all died? The solution was given in the ministry of the high priest. We have the same problem they did – our sinfulness and God's holiness don't mix. How can we exist in the presence of a holy God? We too need a high priest and that's who Jesus is for us. So in learning about the High Priest at the tabernacle we will also see more clearly who Jesus is for us.

Read Exodus 28:1-5.

“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.

If you remember back to when God called Moses through the burning bush, he also called his brother Aaron to be his mouthpiece, and now God was appointing Aaron and his sons to serve as priests in the tabernacle. The whole Levite tribe would serve as priests, but there was only one high priest – Aaron was the first and one of his descendants would always be in that position. The High Priest had a very specific role and that’s what this chapter focuses on.

God told Moses that they were to make holy garments for Aaron that were “for glory and beauty.” Verse 3 says they were to be skillfully woven which means the High Priest would stand out among the people and look like no one else. And there were several different parts to these garments as you can see in verse 4 and each of them is described in this chapter. I want to describe them to you and show you some pictures so you can understand what they looked like, why they were significant, and what their purpose was. Rather than going in the order they’re listed, I think it will make more sense if I start with the inner layer of clothing and work out from there, so we’re going to jump around a little bit.

Read Exodus 28:42-43.

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.

So the first layer was white, linen undergarments that basically looked like shorts (picture). These were to be put on whenever the priests ministered in the tabernacle. According to the Reformation Study Bible these undergarments set

them apart from the priests of other religions where ritual nakedness was often practiced. This was forbidden in Israel.

The next layer is described in Exodus 28:39-41.

*“You shall weave the coat (of the high priest) in checker work of fine linen, and you shall make a turban of fine linen, and you shall make a sash embroidered with needlework.”*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.*

So after the undergarments there was this layer of all-white linen to be worn from head to foot. The turban went on Aaron's head and similar caps on the heads of the other priests. Then there was a white coat or kind of a robe. Aaron's was to be woven in a checker pattern, which was more fancy than the rest. And finally, each priest was to wear a white sash, or belt to hold their coat in place. Here again, Aaron's was to be embroidered with needlework so that it was more beautiful than the rest.

At this point all the priests were clothed in white, linen garments with Aaron's being more elaborate than the rest. If you think of how white is used in Scripture, it often symbolizes cleanliness and purity and that's what's happening here. Psalm 51:7 says, *“Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.”* Isaiah 1:18 says, *“Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.”* And that's the idea behind the white garments of the priests. The priests themselves weren't pure because of their sins, but after offering sacrifices, doing ritual washings, and putting on these white garments, they represented purity in their priestly ministry before the Lord and his people.

The author of Hebrews is very clear that the purpose behind the priests, especially the High Priest, was to be a shadow of Christ who is our Great High Priest in the heavenly places. So the white linen garments of the priests in the tabernacle are significant because they point to the purity and sinless perfection of Christ. He didn't wear pure clothing; he was pure himself. Hebrews 7:26 says, *“For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent,*

unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens.” Christ is able to be our perfect high priest before God because he is perfectly pure and sinless, and that’s what the inner layer of priestly garments points to. So the white linens are very important.

From this point on, the rest of the clothing was only for the High Priest. I want to start with something he wore across his forehead, on top of the turban, which was a golden plate or a golden crown.

Read Exodus 28:36-38.

“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.”

When Adam and Eve sinned, not only did humans fall under the curse of sin, but the earth did as well. Genesis 3:17-18 says, “cursed is the ground because of you,” and “thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you.” So when the people of Israel brought gifts to offer to the Lord, they were bringing things that had to be consecrated in order to be acceptable. God provided for this through the golden crown – the crown would bear the guilt so that the gifts would be holy to the Lord.

Scholars believe this is a shadow of Christ’s work of redemption that applies not only to the human race, but to the whole earth as well. Romans 8:21 says that in Christ *“the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.”* When Jesus hung on the cross he wore a crown and do you remember what that crown was made of? Thorns, which represented the curse of sin on the earth. Scholars think that the golden crown of the high priest was a copy of that crown that symbolized that in Christ’s death, he would bear the curse of sin that was upon the earth so that when he returns it will be set free from corruption.

The next garment went on top of the white linen coat, and this was a robe of solid blue.

Read Exodus 28:31-35.

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.

According to the Christian Study Library, blue is the symbolic color of the heavens, and a robe speaks of authority – something kings would wear. So this robe conferred heavenly authority on the high priest. But because the high priest was a shadow of Christ, this robe also likely symbolizes Christ as our king in the heavens who has the authority to serve before God on our behalf. Philippians 2:9-11 speaks of his authority: *“Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”* Jesus is the only one who has the right to minister in the heavens on our behalf.

Over the top of the robe were two more holy garments. The first was called the ephod, the second was the breastpiece. First, the ephod – you can picture it like a specialized vest that was made to hold the breastpiece.

Read Exodus 28:6-14.

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.*

It's hard to know the exact style of the ephod, but I think it's kind of like an extravagant vest. In verse 6 it says that it was to be made of gold, of blue, purple, and scarlet yarns, and finely twined lined, skillfully woven together. These colors were intentional and also show up in another place. It says in Exodus 26:1: *"Moreover, you shall make the tabernacle with ten curtains of fine twined linen and blue and purple and scarlet yarns."* And a few verses later in verse 6 it says, *"And you shall make fifty clasps of gold, and couple the curtains one to the other with the clasps, so that the tabernacle may be a single whole."*

So the ephod was purposefully made to look like the inside of the tabernacle, which is very significant in understanding the role of the high priest. I watched a great video by a pastor named Mike Winger called *"The Mystery of The High Priest's Garments"* and as he describes the ephod he notes how on the outside, the High Priest was a representative of the inside of the tabernacle. He was representing Yahweh as he was serving among the people. That's why the ephod was made to look like the inside of the tabernacle. The high priest was God's representative.

This too was a shadow of Christ's ministry as our high priest. The Son of God took on flesh and dwelt among us as God's representative. In John 1:14 it says, *"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."* Hebrews 1:3 tells us, *"He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature."* This is who Christ is as our great High Priest and that's one of the things the ephod was pointing to.

But there's another part of the ephod that's very important. On top of the shoulders there was to be fastened two onyx stones, set in gold, on which they were to engrave the names of the twelve tribes of Israel – six on each stone. Exodus 28:12 says these were to be *"stones of remembrance for the sons of Israel. And Aaron shall bear their names before the Lord on his two shoulders for remembrance."* So not only was the High Priest to wear the colors and fabric of

the tabernacle to represent God before the people, he was also to wear the names of the tribes of Israel on his shoulders to represent the people as he appeared before God. The High Priest was both the representative of God before the people and of the people before God.

And this is exactly who Christ is. Not only is he God's representative among us, but he is seated in the heavenly places serving as our representative before God. Hebrews 2:17 says, *"Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people."* And Hebrews 6:19-20 says: *"We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, ²⁰ where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek."* The meaning behind the ephod is amazing once you start to understand what it is and how it correlates with the ministry of Christ.

Now we get to the last garment – the breastpiece, which attached to the front of the ephod with gold chains.

Read Exodus 28:15-21.

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.

And then it says in verses 29-30: *"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."*

God told Moses that the precious stones of the breastpiece represented the twelve tribes of Israel, and as Aaron wore them on his heart before the Lord in the Holy Place, he would bear the judgment of the people. The breastpiece also held the Urim and Thummim, and it doesn't say what they were, but Scripture says they were used to receive oracles from God, perhaps having to do with judgment. So it's important to see that because of the high priest, the people didn't bear their own judgment, the high priest did. He took it upon himself as he wore the breastpiece.

And again, this is a beautiful shadow of Christ because he bore the judgment for our sins when he died on the cross. Hebrews 9:24-26 says, *"For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.²⁵ Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the holy places every year with blood not his own,²⁶ for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself."*

So you can see tremendous significance of the garments of the high priest both in his ministry in the tabernacle and as a shadow of the ministry of Christ.

- The white linens represented the purity of the priests but also pointed to our Great High Priest who is perfect and sinless as he ministers in the heavens on our behalf.
- The golden crown bore the guilt of the people's gifts and is a copy of the crown Jesus wore on the cross when he reconciled all things to God, in heaven and on earth.
- The blue robe spoke of the heavenly authority of the high priest and was a shadow of Christ and the ultimate authority given him by God.
- The ephod declared that the high priest was the representative of God before the people and of the people before God, which is exactly what Jesus is for us today.
- And the breastpiece bore the judgment of the people so they wouldn't have to – a copy of our Savior who bore our judgment on the tree.

The clothing of the high priest gives us many reasons to glory in and worship our Great High Priest today. Because of his ministry in the heavens, we can draw near

to God in his holiness without being consumed. He washed away our sins by his blood and when God looks at us, he sees the righteousness of Christ. And for that reason, it says this in Hebrews 10:19-22: *“Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus,²⁰ by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh,²¹ and since we have a great priest over the house of God,²² 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.”*