



The Sanctuary — The Priesthood

Exodus 28; 39

By divine direction the **tribe of Levi** was set apart for the service of the sanctuary. In the earliest times every man was the priest of his own household. In the days of Abraham the priesthood was regarded as the birthright of the eldest son. Now, instead of the first-born of all Israel, the Lord accepted the tribe of Levi for the work of the sanctuary. By this signal honor He manifested His approval of their fidelity, both in adhering to His service and in executing His judgments when Israel apostatized in the worship of the golden calf. (*PP 350.1*)

The priesthood, however, was restricted to the **family of Aaron**. Aaron and his sons alone were permitted to minister before the Lord; the rest of the tribe were **entrusted with the charge of the tabernacle and its furniture**, and they were to attend upon the priests in their ministrations, but they were not to sacrifice, to burn incense, or to see the holy things till they were covered. (*PP* 350.1)

Aaron's Garments — Ex 28:4

- Breastplate — A “span” was half a cubit, or about $10\frac{1}{3}$ in.
- Ephod
- Robe
- Broidered coat
- Miter
- Girdle
- Linen breeches — v. 42

In accordance with their office, a special dress was appointed for the priests. “Thou shalt make holy garments for Aaron thy brother, for glory and for beauty,” was the divine direction to Moses. The robe of the **common priest** was of white linen, and woven in one piece. It extended nearly to the feet and was confined about the waist by a white linen girdle embroidered in blue, purple, and red. A linen turban, or miter, completed his outer costume. (*PP* 350.2)

Moses at the burning bush was directed to put off his sandals, for the ground whereon he stood was holy. So the priests were not to enter the sanctuary with shoes upon their feet. Particles of dust cleaving to them would desecrate the holy place. They were to leave their shoes in the court before entering the sanctuary, and also to wash both their hands and their feet before ministering in the tabernacle or at the altar of burnt offering. **Thus was constantly taught the lesson that all defilement must be put away from those who would approach into the presence of God. (PP 350.2)**

The **garments of the high priest** were of costly material and beautiful workmanship, befitting his exalted station. In addition to the linen dress of the common priest, he wore a robe of blue, also woven in one piece. Around the skirt it was ornamented with golden bells, and pomegranates of blue, purple, and scarlet. Outside of this was the ephod, a shorter garment of gold, blue, purple, scarlet, and white. It was confined by a girdle of the same colors, beautifully wrought. The ephod was sleeveless, and on its gold-embroidered shoulder pieces were set two onyx stones, bearing the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. (*PP 350.3*)

Over the ephod was **the breastplate, the most sacred of the priestly vestments**. This was of the same material as the ephod. It was in the form of a square, measuring a span, and was suspended from the shoulders by a cord of blue from golden rings. The **border** was formed of a variety of precious stones, the same that form the twelve foundations of the City of God. **Within the border were twelve stones** set in gold, arranged in rows of four, and, like those in the shoulder pieces, engraved with the names of the tribes. (*PP 351.1*)

The Lord's direction was, "Aaron shall bear the names of the children of Israel in the breastplate of judgment upon his heart, when he goeth in unto the holy place, for a memorial before the Lord continually." Exodus 28:29. So Christ, the great High Priest, pleading His blood before the Father in the sinner's behalf, bears upon His heart the name of every repentant, believing soul. Says the psalmist, "I am poor and needy; yet the Lord thinketh upon me."
Psalm 40:17. (*PP* 351.1)

At the right and left of the breastplate were two large stones of great brilliancy. These were known as the **Urim and Thummim**. By them the will of God was made known through the high priest. When questions were brought for decision before the Lord, a halo of light encircling the precious stone at the right was a token of the divine consent or approval, while a cloud shadowing the stone at the left was an evidence of denial or disapprobation. (*PP* 351.2)

The **miter** of the high priest consisted of the white linen turban, having attached to it by a lace of blue, a gold plate bearing the inscription, “Holiness to Jehovah.” Everything connected with the apparel and deportment of the priests was to be such as to impress the beholder with a sense of the holiness of God, the sacredness of His worship, and the purity required of those who came into His presence. (*PP* 351.3)

Garments — Ex 28:4

- Breastplate — A “span” was half a cubit, or about $10\frac{1}{3}$ in.
- Ephod
- Robe
- Broidered coat
- Miter
- Girdle
- Linen breeches — v. 42

Ephod

The high priest always wore the long white linen robe of the common priest, but over this was a robe of blue woven in one piece, and beautifully ornamented around the skirt with golden bells and pomegranates of blue, purple, and gold. The ephod, a sleeveless garment of white linen, beautifully embroidered in gold, blue, purple, and scarlet, was worn over the blue robe. This was shorter than the other garments, and was confined at the waist by a richly embroidered girdle of the same color. (Haskell, *The Cross and Its Shadow*, 87)



On the gold embroidered shoulders of the ephod were two onyx stones, on which were engraved the names of the twelve tribes of Israel, six names on each shoulder.



The breastplate was of the same material as the ephod. It was in the form of a square and measured a span. In it were set in gold twelve precious stones, arranged three in a row. On each stone was engraved the name of one of the tribes of Israel. Around these was a border of a variety of stones. The stones in the breastplate were the same as those that form the foundation of the New Jerusalem. The breastplate hung from the shoulders of the ephod and was fastened at the waist by a blue cord through gold rings. (Ibid.)

How God Communicated with Men

- Above the mercy seat was the Shekinah, the manifestation of the divine Presence; and from between the cherubim, God made known His will. Divine messages were sometimes communicated to the high priest by a **voice** from the cloud. Sometimes a **light** fell upon the angel at the right, to signify approval or acceptance, or a shadow or cloud rested upon the one at the left to reveal disapproval or rejection. (*PP* 349.1)

Set in the breastplate, one on either side, were two brilliant stones, called the **Urim** and **Thummim**. By means of these stones the mind of the Lord could be ascertained by the high priest. When questions were asked, if light encircled the precious stone at the right, the answer was in the affirmative; but if a shadow rested on the stone at the left, the answer was negative.

Urim and Thummim

- Ex 28:30 — instruction about placing it
- Lev 8:8 — instruction again
- Num 27:21 — the priest asks counsel with Urim
- Deut 33:8 — Moses's blessing to Levi
- 1 Sam 28:6 — the Lord uses dreams, Urim, prophets
- Ezra 2:63 and Neh 7:65 — refers to the priest with the Urim and Thummim

There was one other article belonging to the high priest's garments, — the miter, or bonnet. A gold plate bearing the inscription, "Holiness to Jehovah," was fastened by a blue lace to the front of the white bonnet, or turban, worn by the priests. No priest was allowed to wear the priestly garments except when officiating in the sanctuary or court. (Haskell)

Priesthood

- When Aaronic priests grew in number so that not all were needed at the same time for the services of the temple, they were divided into twenty-four courses, each of which took turns in officiating at the services. Each serve one week at Jerusalem twice a year, the rest of the time being spent in the home district helping and teaching the people. At first a strict order was maintained in the rotation of the courses; but when corruption later came in, the order of the courses was disarranged, and in the time of Christ, the Biblical rotation was no longer followed. (Andreasen, p. 40)

The priests were, first of all, mediators. This was pre-eminently their work. Although the sinner brought the offering, he could not sprinkle the blood. Neither could he eat the shewbread nor offer the incense nor trim the lamps. All this someone else must do for him. Although he could approach the temple, he could not enter it; though he could supply the sacrifice, he could not offer it; though he could kill the lamb, he could not minister the blood. God was accessible to him only through the mediation of the priesthood. He could approach God only in the person of another. All this would strikingly bring to mind the fact that he needed someone to intercede for him, someone to intervene. (Ibid. 45–46)

The whole sanctuary service is grounded in mediation. Even though the sinner brought the lamb, even though he killed it, the service could be made efficacious only through a mediator who would sprinkle the blood.

. . . mediation was the underlying purpose of the priesthood . . . (Ibid. 47, 48)