

# 20. The Holy Priesthood

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We have seen that many articles and furniture of the tabernacle which all point to the person and work of Christ in our previous studies. Now we come to the people who serve in the tabernacle. The Levites were to care for the tabernacle, and Aaron and his sons were to be the priests. Aaron was to be the high priest.

It was God's desire that the nation of Israel be "a kingdom of priests" in the world, revealing His glory and sharing His blessings with the unbelieving nations around them. But in order to magnify a holy God, Israel had to be a holy people, and that's where the Aaronic priesthood came in.

But Israel failed to live like a kingdom of priests. Instead, the spiritual leadership in the nation gradually deteriorated until the priests actually permitted the people to worship idols in the temple of God.

Today, God wants all the born-again believers of Jesus Christ to minister in this world as a holy and a royal priesthood. But some of denominations of Christianity are nothing more than names. They sold themselves to the liberal social agendas and popularity among people. They are forgetting that God is God, not somebody they can ignore.

If God's people are faithful in their priestly ministry, they will proclaim the praises of Him who called them out of darkness into His marvelous light. As we study the Old Testament priesthood, you will see significant parallels between the work of the Jewish priests in the past and the ministry of "the holy priesthood" in the church today.

## A. GARMENTS FOR THE PRIESTHOOD

*Exodus 28:1-5 "Now take Aaron your brother, and his sons with him, from among the children of Israel, that he may minister to Me as priest, Aaron and Aaron's sons: Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. 2 And you shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother, for glory and for beauty. 3 So you shall speak to all who are gifted artisans, whom I have filled with the spirit of wisdom, that they may make Aaron's garments, to consecrate him, that he may minister to Me as priest. 4 And these are the garments which they shall make: a breastplate, an ephod, a robe, a skillfully woven tunic, a turban, and a sash. So they shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother and his sons, that he may minister to Me as priest. 5 "They shall take the gold, blue, purple, and scarlet thread, and the fine linen,*

In order for Aaron to serve as high priest he had to have holy garments. And these garments speak of Christ. The Hebrew word for 'holy' means "set apart." These garments were set apart for the service of God. Anything that is set apart for God is holy.

God's people today must remember that our first obligation is to please the Lord and serve Him. If we do this, then He will work in us and through us to accomplish His will in this world.

When Jesus restored Peter to discipleship after His resurrection, He didn't ask "Do you love the ministry?" or even "Do you love people?" His repeated question was,

“Do you love Me?” Our foremost important obligation and privilege is to love the Lord. All ministry flows out of that relationship.

In serving God and the people, the high priest wore seven pieces of clothing:

- 1) Undergarments
- 2) White inner robe
- 3) Blue robe over that, with bells and pomegranates on the hem
- 4) Ephod, a sleeveless garment of gold, blue, purple and scarlet, held together by a jeweled clasp on each shoulder
- 5) Girdle at the waist
- 6) Jeweled breastplate, held in place on the ephod by golden chains attached to the shoulder clasps
- 7) White linen turban with a golden plate on it that said “Holiness to the Lord”

## **B. THE EPHOD**

*Exodus 28:6 and they shall make the ephod of gold, blue, purple, and scarlet thread, and fine woven linen, artistically worked. 7 It shall have two shoulder straps joined at its two edges, and so it shall be joined together. 8 And the intricately woven band of the ephod, which is on it, shall be of the same workmanship, made of gold, blue, purple, and scarlet thread, and fine woven linen. 9 “Then you shall take two onyx stones and engrave on them the names of the sons of Israel: 10 six of their names on one stone and six names on the other stone, in order of their birth. 11 With the work of an engraver in stone, like the engravings of a signet, you shall engrave the two stones with the names of the sons of Israel. You shall set them in settings of gold. 12 And you shall put the two stones on the shoulders of the ephod as memorial stones for the sons of Israel. So Aaron shall bear their names before the LORD on his two shoulders as a memorial. 13 You shall also make settings of gold, 14 and you shall make two chains of pure gold like braided cords, and fasten the braided chains to the settings.*

Ephod is a Hebrew word for a simple sleeveless linen garment. The significant thing about this ephod was not the fabric or the colors. It was that the names of six tribes of Israel were engraved on each onyx stone on the shoulder clasps, according to their birth order. Whenever the high priest wore this priest garment, he carried the people on his shoulders before the Lord.

Priests represent people to God while prophets represent God to people.

Do you remember the parable Jesus gave about the little lost sheep? The shepherd went out and found it and carried it on his shoulders. Jesus Christ as the High Priest carries us. What a lovely picture the ephod gives us about Christ!

## **C. THE BREASTPLATE**

*Exodus 28:15-30 “You shall make the breastplate of judgment. Artistically woven according to the workmanship of the ephod you shall make it: of gold, blue, purple, and scarlet thread, and fine woven linen, you shall make it. 16 It shall be doubled into a square: a span shall be its length, and a span shall be its width. 17 And you shall put settings of stones in it, four rows of stones: The first row shall be a sardius, a topaz, and an emerald; this shall be the first row; 18 the second row shall be a turquoise, a sapphire, and a diamond; 19 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 settings. 21 And the*

stones shall have the names of the sons of Israel, twelve according to their names, like the engravings of a signet, each one with its own name; they shall be according to the twelve tribes. 22 "You shall make chains for the breastplate at the end, like braided cords of pure gold. 23 And you shall make two rings of gold for the breastplate, and put the two rings on the two ends of the breastplate. 24 Then you shall put the two braided chains of gold in the two rings which are on the ends of the breastplate; 25 and the other two ends of the two braided chains you shall fasten to the two settings, and put them on the shoulder straps of the ephod in the front. 26 "You shall make two rings of gold, and put them on the two ends of the breastplate, on the edge of it, which is on the inner side of the ephod. 27 And two other rings of gold you shall make, and put them on the two shoulder straps, underneath the ephod toward its front, right at the seam above the intricately woven band of the ephod. 28 They shall bind the breastplate by means of its rings to the rings of the ephod, using a blue cord, so that it is above the intricately woven band of the ephod, and so that the breastplate does not come loose from the ephod. 29 "So Aaron shall bear the names of the sons of Israel on the breastplate of judgment over his heart, when he goes into the holy place, as a memorial before the LORD continually. 30 And you shall put in the breastplate of judgment the Urim and the Thummim, and they shall be over Aaron's heart when he goes in before the LORD. So Aaron shall bear the judgment of the children of Israel over his heart before the LORD continually.

The breastplate was a piece of beautifully embroidered fabric, nine square inches when folded in half. It hung on the high priest's chest, supported by two golden chains attached to the shoulder clasps. On the breastplate were twelve beautiful jewels, arranged in four rows, each stone representing one of the tribes of Israel.

So the high priest not only carried the people on his shoulders, but he also carried them over his heart. If we don't have sincere love for others in our hearts, we won't be concerned about their needs, and we will not help them.

Helping people and meeting their spiritual needs is what ministry is all about. This demands a great deal of patient love on our part and willingness to sacrifice our convenience for the sake of others. We are a "holy royal priesthood," but we also must constantly be a "loving priesthood."

I believe that these twelve gemstones are the same ones from Revelation 21:19-20 describes the foundations of the walls of the New Jerusalem.

The names Urim and Thummim mean "Lights and Perfections." We aren't sure what they were or how they were used. Believers today don't have devices such as the Urim and Thummim for determining what God wants us to do, but we do have the Word of God to guide our steps.

The Word of God reveals the God of the Word, His character, His desires and His purposes for His people, and the better we know God, the better we can discover His will. God's Word contains precepts for us to obey, warnings for us to heed, promises for us to claim, and principles for us to follow. If we're sincerely willing to obey, God is willing to direct us.

## D. THE BLUE ROBE

*Exodus 28:31-35 "You shall make the robe of the ephod all of blue. 32 There shall be an opening for his head in the middle of it; it shall have a woven binding all around its opening, like the opening in a coat of mail, so that it does not tear. 33 And upon its hem you shall make pomegranates of blue, purple, and scarlet, all around its hem, and bells of gold between them all around: 34 a golden bell and a pomegranate, a golden bell and a pomegranate, upon the hem of the robe all around. 35 And it shall be upon Aaron when he ministers, and its sound will be heard when he goes into the holy place before the LORD and when he comes out, that he may not die.*

The pomegranates speak of fruitfulness, and the bells speak of witness. We should have both of these in our lives. We ought to be a witness for Christ, and there ought to be the fruit of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Too many people want to witness but do not have a life to back it up. There are also some folk who have a life to back up a witness, but who do not witness.

The high priest had to be right with God before he enter into the tabernacle. They always tied a rope to his foot. And if the bells would cease, the people outside of the tabernacle would pull the rope to drag his dead body out.

## E. THE TURBAN, THE TUNICS AND SASHES

*Exodus 28:36-39 "You shall also make a plate of pure gold and engrave on it, like the engraving of a signet: HOLINESS TO THE LORD. 37 And you shall put it on a blue cord, that it may be on the turban; it shall be on the front of the turban. 38 So it shall be on Aaron's forehead, that Aaron may bear the iniquity of the holy things which the children of Israel hallow in all their holy gifts; and it shall always be on his forehead, that they may be accepted before the LORD. 39 "You shall skillfully weave the tunic of fine linen thread, you shall make the turban of fine linen, and you shall make the sash of woven work.*

The turban was worn only by the high priest.

It comes as a shock to some people to learn that Jesus did not die to make us happy. Rather He died to make sinners holy. The first step toward happiness is holiness. If we're right with God, then we can start being right with others and with the circumstances of life that trouble us. If we aim for happiness, we'll miss it, but if we aim for holiness, we'll also find happiness in the Lord.

We can find several contrasts between Jesus' clothing when He accomplished His great priestly work on the cross and the garments of the High Priest:

- 1) Jesus wore no beautiful ephod – only a purple robe for mocking.
- 2) Jesus had no precious gems on His shoulders, only a cross that we deserved.
- 3) Jesus had no breastplate with "Israel on His heart," yet He died with a broken heart for Israel and all of mankind.
- 4) As the High Priest, Jesus had a seamless robe that was not torn, but it was stripped away at the cross.
- 5) Jesus heard no delicate sound of bells proving that the High Priest was alive, only the sound of pounding nails insuring our High Priest's death.
- 6) Jesus wore no fine linen turban, rather a painful crown of thorns.
- 7) Jesus had no head plate reading Holiness to the Lord, but a life and death showing nothing but holiness to the Lord!
- 8) Jesus had no linen trousers to hide His nakedness, rather He bore our sins on the cross in naked shame.

## **F. THE GARMENTS OF THE PRIESTS**

*Exodus 28:40-43 "For Aaron's sons you shall make tunics, and you shall make sashes for them. And you shall make hats for them, for glory and beauty. 41 So you shall put them on Aaron your brother and on his sons with him. You shall anoint them, consecrate them, and sanctify them, that they may minister to Me as priests. 42 And you shall make for them linen trousers to cover their nakedness; they shall reach from the waist to the thighs. 43 They shall be on Aaron and on his sons when they come into the tabernacle of meeting, or when they come near the altar to minister in the holy place, that they do not incur iniquity and die. It shall be a statute forever to him and his descendants after him.*

Nobody who is working wholeheartedly for the Lord will deny that there is joy in serving Jesus, but at the same time, we must cultivate reverence and godly fear. If the Lord killed every believer today who didn't enter seriously into his or her service, how many workers would be left? Fearing the Lord doesn't mean that we are flat out scared of God, rather being reverent and humble before a loving Father and gracious Lord.

While we study this chapter, we couldn't help ourselves but to think that this priest's garments are awful fancy with all that pure gold and jewels God told them to attach. Somehow that goes against our stereo-type of concepts regarding what Christians are supposed to wear and have. Some weird people think that Christians should not have anything nice or beautiful. Where do they get that idea? When we study the Bible, we find that everything God does is beautiful, nice and well done.

I am not, by any means, encouraging you to go crazy with your credit cards to make yourselves up look like you just walk out of a fashion plate. Being neat and clean and well-kept would be nice to represent our Lord Jesus instead of wearing all worn out clothing purposely with bad breath and telling people they should be Christians like them. I don't think we can win a whole lot of converts with bad breath.

## **G. APPLICATIONS**

**1) Our foremost important obligation and privilege is to love the Lord. All ministry flows out of that relationship.**

**2) Helping people and meeting their spiritual needs is what ministry is all about.**

This demands a great deal of patient love on our part and willingness to sacrifice our convenience for the sake of others. We are a "holy royal priesthood," but we also must constantly be a "loving priesthood."

**3) God's Word contains precepts for us to obey, warnings for us to heed, promises for us to claim, and principles for us to follow.**

If we're sincerely willing to obey, God is willing to direct us.

**4) If we aim for happiness, we'll miss it, but if we aim for holiness, we'll also find happiness in the Lord.**