

## JEHOVAH'S PLANS FOR THE SANCTUARY

### Chapters 28 – 30, 39 The Priesthood

So far in this study, I have dedicated many pages to the details surrounding Moses' interaction with the Lord and the worship habits of the Israelites, namely the Tabernacle compound and the individual items contained in it. Though some may find those particulars a bit tedious, I feel it is important to be aware of all the specifics. After all, this is not a travel log journal we have been studying, nor is it Moses' diary about the adventures of his people as they traveled through the desert. We are learning about what was required in order to offer reverent service and proper worship to the Almighty God, our Creator. To that end, we are about to single out the priesthood as another element of their worship under the old law, and treat it with the same careful detail.

We must remember, though, that no single component of this worship: offering sacrifices, observing festival days, tithing, celebrating the Passover to name a few would – alone – have been sufficient to please the Lord. Each element had to be included, all working in harmony and following the principles set forth in the Law of Moses. Only then could Jehovah be properly honored.

Some commentators believe it would have been easier for us to understand the discussion of the holy garments and the consecration of the priesthood if these chapters that we are about to study had been shuffled into a different section of this book. I disagree. There is a natural connection between the priesthood instructions (holy garments and consecration) and the description of the holy vessels and other parts of the tabernacle that we have covered in the previous lessons. Is it possible that Moses actually did his writing on many small scrolls and those responsible for organizing our Bible got them in the wrong order? That has been suggested, but I don't think so. In chapter 39:32, near the end of the book, we find the following: ***“Thus was all the work of the tabernacle of the tent of the congregation finished; and the children of Israel did according to all that the Lord commanded Moses, so did they.”*** Everything has been completed; all is working together so that Jehovah can be properly worshiped; and the Israelites have a law to live by. So for me, everything fits smoothly together just as it appears, and the flow of the book is as it should be.

# A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF EXODUS

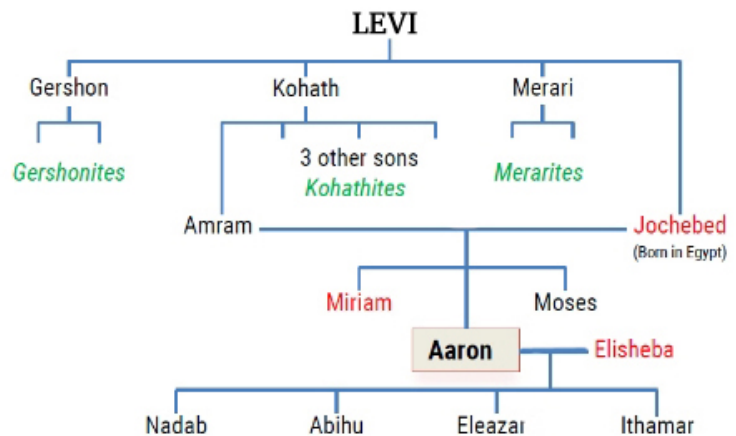
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## WHO WERE THE PRIESTS? –

*"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."* (Exodus 28:1)

Verse 1 plainly tells us that in this early time period there were a total of only five priests: Aaron and his four sons Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. Aaron was the "High Priest" with his sons serving under him. It is worth mentioning that, **while it is true that all priests were Levites (direct descendants of Jacob's third son, Levi)** it is **NOT** true that all Levites were priests! Notice in this diagram that only a portion of Levi's descendants were destined for the priesthood. His grandson **Amram** and his youngest daughter **Jochebed** would be responsible for the priesthood lineage as the parents of Miriam, Moses and, of course, Aaron, the first High Priest.



Not long after the events we are discussing here in Exodus, Aaron's first two sons, Nadab and Abihu, were struck dead for offering "strange fire" to Jehovah (detailed in Leviticus 10). So, since neither of them had descendents, the entire Priesthood would come through Aaron's other sons Eleazar and Ithamar. We know that the older of the two, Eleazar, found favor in God's eyes because he was allowed to accompany Moses up the mountain at one point. He also succeeded his father as High Priest. His son Phinehas followed after him and an event described in Numbers 25 tells us that he pleased God as well. If not for reasons of having been the older son who found favor with God, then certainly for the actions of Phinehas, only descendants of Eleazar were eligible to be a High Priest. Numbers 25:11-12 tells us *"Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, has turned back My wrath from the children of Israel, because he was zealous with My zeal among them . . . Therefore say, 'Behold, I give to him My covenant of peace; and it shall be to him and his descendants after him a covenant of an everlasting priesthood, because he was zealous for his God..."* I don't know if many people have ever

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considered this fact, but after the death of Nadab and Abihu, that left only THREE priests to serve the spiritual needs of what has been estimated to be about 2 million people. That brings us to the next question:

## WHAT WAS INVOLVED IN THE SERVICE OF THE PRIESTS?

In Hebrews 8, we are told that *“every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices.”* That was certainly their primary duty in the early times, plus any involvement they had in the making of the Tabernacle. The same chapter of Hebrews also makes the point that the priests and their ministrations were examples and shadows of heavenly things to come. In fact, in Exodus 25:40 it is stated, *“And see to it that you make them according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain,”* (This was spoken to Moses concerning the holy vessels) and is quoted word for word in Hebrews 8, referring to both the tabernacle and the priesthood. Therefore, the point is made that we – New Testament Christians – are under a *“more excellent ministry”* which was only “pointed to” with the Old Testament priesthood with its sanctuary (the tabernacle), the garments, consecration, and the day to day service. *“But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises.” (Hebrews 8:6)*

## HOW WERE THE PRIESTS TO BE CLOTHED? –

*“And you shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother, for glory and for beauty. 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. 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.” (Exodus 28:2 – 4 NKJV)*

Pictured at the top of the next page there is an image from a Jewish website that shows the typical dress for a **PRIEST** on the left and the **HIGH PRIEST** on the right. The High Priest's garments are obviously much more elaborate.

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Jewish professor, Baruch J. Schwartz, says, “*the garments of the High Priest are not only more elaborate, but they figure more prominently in the Torah, filling the entirety of Exodus 28 and are described again in greater detail in Exodus 39, where they conclude the account of the making of the tabernacle.*”

Prof. Schwartz goes on to say, “*Four of these garments are worn exclusively by the High Priest. They alone are called the holy garments.*” Those four garments are the **Ephod**, **Breastplate**, **Robe**, and the **Diadem**.

These four “Holy Garments” are unlike any other normal article of clothing intended for comfort, or to cover the body for warmth, protection or modesty purposes. Their shape and design – decreed by God – were for “*glory and beauty*,” nothing else. (28:2).

In keeping with the design’s purpose of “*glory and beauty*”, pure gold and precious stones were also part of the ensemble for the High Priest. The clasps located on each shoulder were made of pure gold and inlaid with onyx. The breastplate hung from the shoulder clasps on chains made of pure gold, and the breastplate itself had twelve precious stones mounted on it. The Miter (“turban”) covered the head with fine linen with a blue cord (ribbon?) to attach the gold plate above the eyes. I imagine the garments were heavy and uncomfortable to wear – certainly not designed for normal activities. Nevertheless, the High Priest wore them at least twice each day, when he entered the tabernacle interior each morning and evening as God directed.

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### The Ephod:

The Ephod, as illustrated in the image above (repeated here) was an elaborate outermost garment, made of fine linen and worn over the blue outer robe from the waist down. According to Professor Schwartz, one of the most striking things about this “apron” was that it was made from the very same fabric used for the “hangings” (curtains) that separated the Most Holy Place from the Holy Place. You may recall that that fabric was a special weave of blue, red, purple and gold threads. If he is correct, my internet search reveals that no accurate illustration exists. So, if we imagine the design and coloring of the one in the image to be blue, red, purple and gold, with intricately woven figures of “heavenly” creatures, we can still get a pretty good idea of what the garment looked like.

A “sash” was made of the same fabric and sewn onto the top of the Ephod with “tails” that were long enough to tie together. Once the sash was tied around the waist of the High Priest it produced an “apron like” garment embroidered with *“fine woven linen, artistically worked”* (28:6).

Also, there were two “suspender like” ribbons of the same fabric attached to the sash in the back that reached over the shoulders of the High Priest. These two “ribbons” terminated above each shoulder with a pure gold clasp that could be connected to two gold chains that were attached to the top of the breastplate, the next garment we will discuss. And, as can be seen in the image above, two blue ribbons of cloth were sewn into the sash on the front that would be looped through two gold rings at the bottom of the breastplate and tied. That, along with the gold chains anchored to each shoulder, would ensure that the Ephod was securely in place over the blue outer robe.



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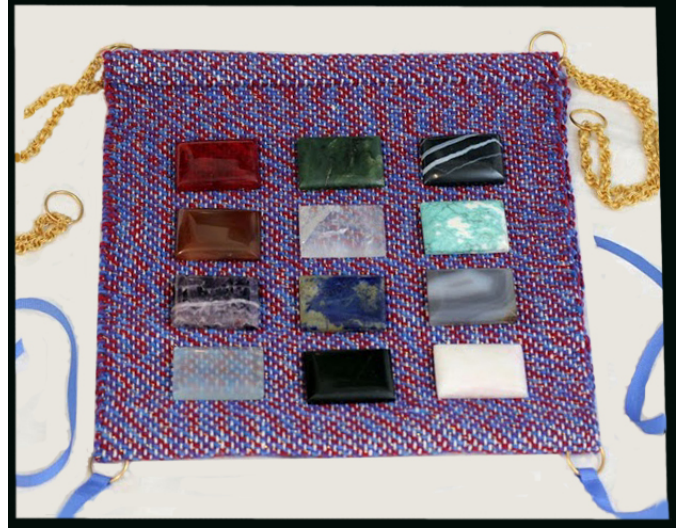
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## The Breastplate:

The breastplate, no doubt, was the most important and valuable of the high priest's clothing. All the rest was merely a backdrop. As its name suggests, it was worn over the High Priest's chest. It hung on two small chains made of pure gold and attached with two gold clasps to the ribbons from the back sash of the Ephod. It was further secured at the bottom via two gold rings with blue ribbons that were tied to the Ephod's sash in the front.

Often depicted as being made of gold, the breastplate was actually made of two layers of the same fabric as the Ephod: fine twisted linen of blue, purple, and scarlet, embroidered with gold threads, I like the image shown here, sewn by a young lady doing her best to duplicate the High Priest's garments... even going so far as to weave her own fabric.



The breastplate (more accurately the ***"Breastpiece of Judgment,"*** because it was where the **Urim** and **Thummim** were kept) measured about nine inches square and the fabric was folded over on the bottom to form a pouch, open at the top, for keeping the **Urim** and the **Thummim** (Exodus 28:15-30).

Mounted on the front of the breastplate were four rows of precious stones, three in each row. Each of the stones was engraved with the name of one of the twelve sons of Israel. The first row contained a ruby (or sardius NKJV), a topaz and a beryl. The second row consisted of a turquoise, a sapphire and an emerald. In the third row a jacinth, an agate and an amethyst. And in the fourth row a chrysolite, an onyx and a jasper. Of course each of these stones symbolized traits significant to the office of High Priest.

Since nothing about our Lord's plan is haphazard or coincidental, it will not surprise you to learn that each stone in the breastplate is representative of the month in which the leader of that tribe



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(the 12 sons of Jacob) was born, and that they were placed into the breastplate in the order of their birth. And here's a bonus fact for you to ponder: In the original manuscripts of the book of Revelation chapter 21, these exact same twelve stones are seen in the foundation of the "New Jerusalem" – the home in Heaven for the faithful – but in reverse order. Now isn't that interesting.

Above I mentioned that the breastplate formed a pouch for keeping the **Urim** and the **Thummim** (Hebrew for "*light*" and "*perfection*" respectively). These were gemstones similar to those attached to the front of the breastplate, but were carried on the inside. They were used by the high priest to "*determine God's will*" in certain circumstances (Hence the name "*breastpiece of justice*"). Naturally, there is much speculation about how God's will was revealed through these stones. Some historians suggest that God would cause the Urim and Thummim to "light up" or "glow" in varying patterns to reveal His decisions. Others put forth the idea that the two stones were of exactly the same weight, feel and cut, but of different color (a diamond and an emerald, for example) so that when the High Priest opened the breastplate and placed his hand in it, he could not tell which was which. If he happened to, say, bring out the "diamond," the answer would go one way, but if he brought out the "emerald," it would be the opposite.

But no one knows, of course, and the Bible is silent in that regard. In fact, references to them are sporadic. They are first mentioned here in Exodus 28, then again in Leviticus 8:8. Also, in Numbers 27:21, when Joshua succeeded Moses and was to receive answers from God by asking Eleazar (*Aaron's son – the High Priest at that time*) to inquire of God using the Urim and Thummim. They are also mentioned in Moses' dying blessing upon Levi in the book of Deuteronomy 33:8 and then finally in 1 Samuel 14:37-45 and 2 Samuel 21:1.

Though beautiful by any standard, the purpose of the breastpiece was functional – to give the High Priest (who was to be the mediator between God and the people after the death of Moses) guidance from Jehovah through use of the Urim and the Thummim. The High Priest was to bring sanctity along with the glory and splendor of the Eternal One to the people, and he was to represent sinful mankind to Jehovah. When dressed in these garments, we might say the High Priest personified the whole of the Israelite people before Jehovah when standing in God's presence in the Holy of Holies. (Exodus 28:12, 29; 39:7)

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## The Outer Robe:

Referring again to the image on page 5, you will notice the blue outer robe. It is sleeveless and full length, extending all the way to the ankles. It is simply made, the only adornment along the hem: ***“...you shall make pomegranates of blue, purple, and scarlet, all around its hem, and bells of gold between them all around”***. Speaking of pomegranates... there is an interesting story about a preacher from Texas moving to California to take up the work there. The first sermon he preached in his new home was titled “Golden Bells and Pomegranates.” At the time he told the congregation he wasn’t sure exactly what a pomegranate was, but he was pretty sure it was not the same fruit they called by that name in Texas, because there pomegranates grow on a vine, and the Bible says these grew on a tree. Well... by four o’clock that same afternoon he had five bushels of (tree grown) pomegranates on his back patio! What a lesson! Both in what an actual pomegranate looks like and maybe also the importance of choosing your words carefully. I wonder if he ate all five bushels.



The pomegranate (shown left) is a “sweet, and savory” fruit, which must describe some aspect of the High Priest. We know the gold bells were worn for the pleasing tone they offered: ***“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”***. (Exodus 28:35)

## The Diadem:

The Diadem (miter or turban) was plain white, with a gold band across the forehead. On the plate were inscribed the words “Holy to the Lord.” This gold band ***“will be on Aaron’s forehead continually so that [the children of Israel] will be acceptable to the Lord”*** (Exodus 28:38). This reminder of consecration, placed so conspicuously on the outfit, symbolized the importance of approaching the Lord God in holiness.

Moses first placed these “Holy Garments” on Aaron at the consecration of the priests described in Leviticus 8, and Aaron wore them until he transferred them to his son and successor, Eleazar, immediately before his death. (Numbers 20:25–28) All successive High Priests were commanded to



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wear them as well (Exodus 29:30 and Leviticus 21:10), and since we're referring to the original garments, I believe we can conclude that Jehovah kept them clean and in their original condition throughout the years, just as He kept the clothing and shoes of the Israelites from wearing out during the 40 years of wandering in the wilderness that will follow.

### THE ATONEMENT MONEY – Ex 30:11-16

*“Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: “When you take the census of the children of Israel for their number, then every man shall give a ransom for himself to the Lord, when you number them, that there may be no plague among them when you number them. This is what everyone among those who are numbered shall give: half a shekel according to the shekel of the sanctuary (a shekel is twenty gerahs). The half-shekel shall be an offering to the Lord. Everyone included among those who are numbered, from twenty years old and above, shall give an offering to the Lord. The rich shall not give more and the poor shall not give less than half a shekel, when you give an offering to the Lord, to make atonement for yourselves. And you shall take the atonement money of the children of Israel, and shall appoint it for the service of the tabernacle of meeting, that it may be a memorial for the children of Israel before the Lord, to make atonement for yourselves.”” (Exo. 30:11-16 NKJV)*

The Hebrew word for “silver” – **“Keseeph,”** – is frequently translated “money.” We have two memorable instances in Scripture where life was bartered for silver: Joseph for twenty, and the Son of God for thirty pieces. So, “price” or “value” was always attached to this precious metal used for buying and selling. Though it doesn't display the brilliant glory of gold, it is still considered beautiful. Like gold, it does not corrode or rust and even intense heat will not destroy it. We also know it was used in the construction of the tabernacle, but this is the first time it is used to refer to “money,” more specifically “atonement money”.

“Atonement money” was the money collected at the time of the census. We might call it a tax, but, with the story of Jesus ever before our eyes, we can see it was actually money that “looked forward” to the Son of God and His work of atonement by going to the cross.

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An Israelite might be able to trace, in unbroken succession, his descent from Abraham or one of Jacob's sons, but that wasn't enough to guarantee him salvation! Even though he may have claimed to be "Abraham's seed," his sinful life declared him a captive of the devil and his fleshly lusts, like it or not. Therefore, God decreed that whenever Israel was numbered, every man must give a "ransom" for his soul. The price was fixed by God Himself – and was the same for everyone.

No one could pay for another person; everyone aged 20 and above was required to tender his own ransom money – of pure silver, and of perfect weight, defined by God. The amount was ***"half a shekel,"*** the standard being the *"shekel of the sanctuary"* which were coins of pure silver (unadulterated with any other metal) and kept as a standard in the Tabernacle. A shekel was 20 gerahs, so half of that – 10 gerahs – would be about 15 cents in today's currency. The half-shekel brought by each man was placed on a scale and compared with the one kept in the tabernacle.

Does it seem interesting that God reasoned that the amount would be the same for everyone, rich or poor? If we consider what we know about grace, about salvation, about the nature of God, this makes sense. All men – the poor as well as the rich, the foolish as well as the wise, the ignorant and the learned, the immoral and the moral – are all on a level playing field in God's eyes – estimated at the same price. He was no respecter of persons then, and still isn't.

John the Baptist prepared the way of the Lord, calling all to repentance, because everyone is in need of a change of heart. In Romans 3, Paul clarifies that there is no difference between the religious Jew and the irreligious Gentile, for ***"all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."***

Other than the fact that we are all equal in God's eyes, did you notice the second truth revealed in this commandment concerning "atonement money"? Righteousness is an individual, personal matter between the soul of man and God. Everyone "brings his own half-shekel." Each individual Israelite had to present himself to the priest, with his piece of silver as a "ransom", and then his name would be entered into God's book.

In John 6, our Savior says ***"...unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you."*** (John 6:53 NKJV) If we want our name entered in Jehovah's book, we have the same responsibility to present ourselves to Him, cleansed by the waters of baptism and willing

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to live our lives in honor to Him. And, as we will see in the next lesson, He is a jealous God who meant what He said when he gave the commandment, *“Thou shall have no other gods before me.”*