

# TLCBiblical.com Video Lessons

## 226 - The Priestly Garments

### 1. Introduction

An often overlooked figure in the scriptures is that of clothing. From the beginning clothing, or the lack of it, has been significant spiritually. As we explore figures in the Law we find that clothing plays an important role in ministering to God and offering sacrifices. In this lesson we'll discuss **The Priestly Garments** and their significance for the time in which they were used as well as their connection to the Messiah.

### 2. The importance of proper dress

We don't usually think of clothing when we discuss biblical symbolism. The subject is generally addressed in reference to modesty and morality. The scriptures show us that clothing has been an important part of mankind's interactions with God and are therefore significant. Adam and Eve were naked in the beginning and weren't ashamed until filled with guilt and fear because they violated God's command. In a quick effort to make themselves feel better "***they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons***" (Gen 3.7). It doesn't take much to imagine the flaws with this solution. When addressed by God they revealed they had sinned and covered themselves as a result. We know the story of how God pronounced consequences for their actions but as the chapter closes we find a significant detail.

***"Unto Adam also and to his wife did the Lord God make coats of skins, and clothed them."*** (Gen 3.21). The Lord provided a more durable and complete covering for the couple. We also need to make note of the fact that animals lost their lives as God made these coverings. This is a subtle type of the coming sacrifice and death of Christ for the sin of mankind providing the final clothing of righteousness for believers. As we come to the time of the Law of Moses and the Tabernacle we find specific instructions on how the priests were to be dressed in order to fulfill their duties. Examining these will enable us to see connections with Christ and Christians as well. We'll take a look at:

- a. Instructions for making the garments including materials and restrictions
- b. Consecration of the priests and the garments
- c. Figurative connections with Christ and believers today

Let's take a look at each of these.

### 3. Making the priestly garments

The first thing to note about the garments for the priests is that God placed the same emphasis on them as he did on the Tabernacle and other objects of worship. The individuals who were involved in the work of making these were guided by the Lord (Ex 28.3). In the instructions

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God provides a list of the articles of clothing to be made and states that this is so Aaron, and his sons, could minister to the Lord in the priest's office (Ex 28.3).

***“And these are the garments which they shall make; a breastplate, and an ephod, and a robe, and a broidered coat, a mitre, and a girdle...”*** (Ex 28.4). God also specifies the colors and fabrics to be used including ***“gold, and blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine linen”*** (Ex 28.5). Notice that these are the same colors and fabrics used in the curtains for the Tabernacle, the Vail and the outer court of the Tabernacle. In essence there is literally a common thread connecting all of these items.

From these instructions the articles of clothing to be made are:

- a. Breastplate
- b. Ephod
- c. Robe
- d. Broidered coat
- e. Mitre
- f. Girdle

Later in the chapter another garment is added to these for Aaron and his sons. ***“And thou shalt make them linen breeches to cover their nakedness; from the loins even unto the thighs they shall reach: And they shall be upon Aaron, and upon his sons, when they come in unto the tabernacle of the congregation, or when they come near unto the altar to minister in the holy place; that they bear not iniquity, and die: it shall be a statute for ever unto him and his seed after him.”*** (Ex 28.42-43). This appears to have been an undergarment worn under the robes of the priest. The significance of these is the statement that without them they would die.

The list of garments to be made now includes:

- a. Breastplate
- b. Ephod
- c. Robe
- d. Broidered coat
- e. Mitre
- f. Girdle
- g. Breeches

Aaron was the high priest whose sons were to minister with and one day succeed him. Garments were made for them as well. In the description we find a degree of differentiation between those worn by the priests. The Lord states, ***“And for Aaron's sons thou shalt make coats, and thou shalt make for them girdles, and bonnets shalt thou make for them, for glory***

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*and for beauty.*” (Ex 28.40). Now that we have an idea of what the garments looked like we can put together the sequence of how Aaron and his sons would have layered them. Once we do that we’ll take a look at each article of clothing and how they were made.

The first article the priest would have put on appears to be the linen breeches. These would cover the priest’s nakedness as stated in the description. The breeches, or pantlike undergarment, went from the waist to their thighs, the area above their knees. Next, the priest would have put on the robe which appears to have been the main covering. Following this the ephod, which resembled a vest or overlay, was placed over the robe. The girdle or belt seems to be the logical choice next to keep everything in place and is referred to in connection with the ephod. Over the Ephod the priest would place the breastplate and followed by the embroidered coat. Finally the mitre would have been placed on the priests head. Caps referred to as bonnets were prepared for Aaron’s sons. Now let’s take a look at how each of these were made. I’ll summarize the description provided due to the detail given but I encourage everyone to take time to read these.

The ephod comes first in the detailed instructions (Ex 28.6-13). It appears to have been made of linen with fibers that were blue, purple, scarlet and gold. Fabric for the curtains of the Tabernacle and the Vail contained blue, purple and scarlet, but gold is added in the crafting of the ephod. Thread spun from gold was woven into the ephod which is a notable difference I’ll discuss when we review figurative connections associated with the ephod.

Its difficult to imagine what the ephod looked like exactly but there are clues in the details of how it was to be made. There were to be two shoulder pieces extending outward indicating the ephod was sleeveless. The girdle of the ephod appears to have been attached to it and was made of the same materials. The ephod may have been worn like a vest that was held in place by the girdle or belt.

An interesting detail is that the ephod was to be adorned with onyx stones on each shoulder. Sockets were made to hold these and both were engraved with the names of the children of Israel. The names were to be listed by birth order with six on each stone (Ex 28.10). An interesting question arises from this description. Based on the command to engrave the names of the children of Israel by their birth order, these may not have been the tribal names. We know that the children of Israel were represented differently in the designation of tribes. For instance, Joseph was represented by the tribes of Manasseh and Ephraim, his double blessing. Levi existed physically as a tribe but didn’t have an inheritance in the land of Canaan. We’ll see a difference in wording for the breastplate in a moment but for now its possible that the names on the onyx stones on the ephod were the actual sons of Jacob listed by birth order rather than a derivative listing of tribes. The onyx stones were to have chains attached to them in the form of wreaths and we’ll see what these were for shortly.

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The next item in the detailed description is the breastplate which is referred to by its full name - the breastplate of judgment (**Ex 28.15-30**). There are several elements that make up the breastplate defining it as an intricate piece of work. When we think of a breastplate we think of armor or metal but in this case we find that the breastplate was made of the same materials and colors as the ephod. The materials listed for the breastplate include gold, blue, purple, scarlet and fine twined linen. Just as with the ephod, gold is used in the creation of the breastplate which strengthens a figurative connection as we'll see later.

The shape and size of the breastplate is given precisely. Its to be "**foursquare**" indicating that the width and length will be identical. The measurement of both dimensions is to be one span or approximately one half cubit. In previous lessons we've estimated the cubit to be roughly eighteen to twenty inches. Using this same estimate the breastplate would be nine to ten inches in width and length. For an average person the breastplate would cover the chest and upper abdomen.

An interesting aspect of the breastplate is the addition of stones that were to be set in sockets similar to those placed on the shoulders of the ephod. There were to be four rows of stones engraved with the names of the children of Israel. When we discussed the names of the children of Israel that were placed on the onyx stones for the ephod, we noted they were listed by birth order. That list may differ from the listing of tribes since Ephraim and Manasseh were grandchildren of Jacob and not his direct offspring. The engraving on the stones of the breastplate, represented the names of the tribes, and the onyx stones on the shoulders of the ephod listed the actual children of Jacob. These lists stand as a before and after record of the transformation of the family to a nation of tribes.

The stones that were placed on the breastplate were specific as God gave them to Moses. These are:

- a. row 1 - Sardius, Topaz, Carbuncle
- b. row 2 - Emerald, Sapphire, Diamond
- c. row 3 - Ligure, Agate, Amethyst
- d. row 4 - Beryl, Onyx, Jasper

What tribal names were engraved on each stone is unclear. The order of the stones and their tribal designation isn't given. **Exodus 39** details the creation of the breastplate but doesn't specify what tribe is associated with each stone.

The finishing touches on the breastplate provided a practical means of securing it in place. There were two golden rings at each of the upper ends to connect it to the ephod. The Gold chains on the ephod I mentioned earlier are now used to connect the breastplate at the shoulder. Four golden rings were placed in the sides of the breastplate and ephod which were tied

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together with blue laces. This would prevent the breastplate from coming loose or being separated from the ephod.

The final description of the breastplate details the addition of two items that are not defined clearly. God states, “*And thou shalt put in the breastplate of judgment the Urim and the Thummim; and they shall be upon Aaron's heart, when he goeth in before the Lord: and Aaron shall bear the judgment of the children of Israel upon his heart before the Lord continually.*” (Ex 28.30). The nature of these items is unclear as is their exact placement. We know they were to be in the breastplate “*upon Aaron's heart*” and identified a true priest as seen in the writing of Ezra and Nehemiah (Ezra 2.63, Neh 7.65).

There's a degree of speculation as to the nature of these items. Some have interpreted them as a type of stone used in divination while others propose theories covering a wide range of possibilities. Everett Fox in **The Five Books Of Moses**, adds a footnote that the two terms, Urim and Thummim, begin with the first and last letters of the Hebrew alphabet. While its not possible to discuss the nature of these objects without subjective speculation, the letters may have figurative importance as we'll see in a little while.

The robe for the priest comes next in the list (Ex 28.31-35). Many artistic illustrations I've seen of the priests robe usually render it as a white cloth. From the description given in God's instructions we see that the robe is to be “*all of blue*” (Ex 28.31). The garment appears to have been made as one piece with a hole at the top that would be pulled over the priests head. Around the hole was a woven binding to prevent tearing. The only other details describe the hem of the robe.

The hem of the robe was an alternating embroidered pattern of a pomegranate followed by a golden bell. The pomegranates were to be blue, purple and scarlet. No detail is provided on whether these colors alternated or if the threads were combined. The significant thing to note is that the pattern and colors of the hem of the robe were similar to those found in the Vail and the curtains of the Tabernacle.

The final set of details are more obscure but provide enough information that we can get an idea of what was being commanded and made. The mitre, or turban as rendered in some literal translations and modern versions, was to have a gold plate engraved with “*Holiness To The Lord*” across it and fastened to the mitre with a blue lace or woven cord (Ex 28.36-37). This is referred to as the “*holy crown*” (Ex 29.6). The mitre, or turban, was to be made of fine linen and included in this is a statement that the “*coat*” was to be made of the same and the girdle, or belt, of needlework. Colors aren't specified for these items but may have matched the robe for the priests.

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Aaron's sons were to minister with him and there's an added note about garments for them as well. "*And for Aaron's sons thou shalt make coats, and thou shalt make for them girdles, and bonnets shalt thou make for them, for glory and for beauty.*" (Ex 28.40). His sons would also have linen "*breeches*" as discussed earlier (Ex 28.42-43).

The emphasis in this lesson is on the priests garments, but it's essential to understand that the garments made for Aaron's sons, and later for others assisting the priest, would have to be made in the manner authorized by God. Aaron, his sons and their respective garments will all need to be consecrated for service in the Tabernacle as we'll see next.

#### 4. Consecration of the priests

This lesson is about the garments worn by the priests so I won't go into a lot of detail on the steps in consecrating Aaron and his sons for their office. It's important however to note some aspects of this as they have implications for figurative connections we'll discuss in a moment. These connections in turn will be important when we discuss the doctrine of the New Testament.

Exodus twenty-nine details the procedure for consecrating Aaron and his sons. There are multiple elements that are present that have significant spiritual and figurative importance including unleavened bread and the blood of sacrificial animals. The actual consecration begins with Moses bringing Aaron and his sons to the door of the Tabernacle. There they were to be washed with water after which Moses was to clothe Aaron in the priests garments. Following this sacrifices were made and blood from these was applied to Aaron and his sons (Ex 29.19-21). As we'll see later the sequence is important and as I mentioned a minute ago will have figurative significance as well.

The consecration was done as God directed. The priests were to wear these garments in the prescribed manner so they wouldn't die as they carried out their tasks. Whether they were inside the Tabernacle or making a sacrifice on the altar of burnt offering, they had to wear the garments specified by God or they would lose their lives. As we examine the priests, their roles and the garments supplied we can see a number of figurative elements that point to God and Christ as the Messiah.

#### 5. Figurative links with Christ and believers

One of the first figurative elements is that of clothing; specifically being clothed by God. I mentioned in the beginning of the lesson that God replaced the fig leaves Adam and Eve had thrown together to cover themselves with coats of skins. I've discussed the idea of modesty and nakedness in another lesson and noted that Adam and Eve reacted out of a sense of guilt. They were literally exposed and completely unprotected. God covered them in more durable garments

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but he did so by taking the lives of animals to make them. In this first incident we see that sin led to guilt. Guilt was debilitating and couldn't be remedied by the couple. God stepped in and provided a protection that covered their guilt, showed the goodness of the Lord and provided a model for the future. The clothing of righteousness by God is figuratively represented in this event and in the Law of Moses.

Aaron was the high priest and was selected by God. In order for him to serve before the Lord garments were made that spoke of majesty reflecting the design of God himself. The garments were of a specific material, contained designated colors and were to be made according to a pattern God would inspire the workman to copy.

Christ was sanctified by God as the high priest of the new covenant that would be made with all mankind. Like Aaron, Christ was ordained for this position and no one else can claim the title or fill that role. Christ embodies the design for salvation that came from God and reflects the glory of God. We find that mirrored in the garments as these are the only items to be made with gold thread woven into the fabric.

Before wearing the priestly garments Aaron and his sons were to be washed with water. This was a figurative cleansing set in place by God and mirrored the purification of those who would come before the Lord. Christ was baptized by John to complete all righteousness (**Matt 3.13-17**) and though he had no sin, he kept all of God's commands and directives. Believers who are washed in water, have their sins removed by God and are clothed in righteousness. We see this in Christ's statements to his disciples (**Matt 28.18-20, Mark 16.15-16**). Paul notes that those who have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ using terms similar to being dressed (**Gal 3.27**).

The garments and their specific characteristics were to be made exactly as God commanded. This shows that detail is critical in dealing with God's commands. Their intricate nature was a figure for the time in which they were used but they emphasize the need to adhere to God's commands and respect the detail. The priests would die if they failed to wear their garments as directed since God wouldn't recognize them.

There are some lessons we need to learn from the priestly garments.

- a. The garments were to made of specific fibers and specific colors
- b. The design came from God who ordered them to follow the pattern exactly
- c. Failure to wear the garments specified or to alter them would spell death for the priest
- d. The priests were washed in water before being clothed in the priestly garments
- e. Being clothed in righteousness today means following God's revealed pattern
- f. Garments not meeting God's design will cost believers their spiritual lives

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- g. Christians are referred to as priests (**1 Pet 2.5**) and must be sanctified in the sight of God as Aaron and his sons were
- h. The stones on the breastplate of judgment represent the presence of God with his people
- i. Christ is our high priest today representing God's people before the Father
- j. Images such as the stones on the breastplate of judgment provide a figure linking the Law with the book of Revelation providing evidence of a common origin
- k. The priestly garments identified the priests clearly just as Christ is identified as the high priest of the faith today and saved believers are known by their garments of righteousness and obedience
- l. Colors used in the priestly garments link them with the Vail which in turn provides a link to Christ who entered the Most Holy Place to offer the final sacrifice for sin for all time.

#### 6. Next

Today there's confusion about when we should worship and why there's a difference between our time and the period governed by the Law of Moses. From the first chapters of Genesis onward there was emphasis on the seventh day. The Ten Commandments specified a day that was to be kept as a holy day. In our time some of these ideas have continued and many don't understand the changes brought about by the death of Christ and the establishment of the church on the day of Pentecost. In our next and final lesson in this series we'll discuss **The Sabbath Day**, what it meant, its significance then, and what it means for us now.