

Title: Between Heaven and Earth  
Text: Exodus 28  
Theme: The High Priest Garment  
Series: Exodus #44  
Prop Stmt. What he wore reflected the impossible job he was called to perform.

Read Text: Exodus 28.1-5

God's plan has always been to live with and amongst his people being enjoyed and enjoying them. For that purpose, God made the earth, and upon this earth, he made a place that was like a temple where he could do just that. That place was called the Garden of Eden. However, Adam plunged the world into darkness when he rebelled against the law of God. He and Eve were banished from the Garden/Temple. Since that day, God has been working to restore that garden; that is God has been working to restore people and the earth to him so that once again God can live with and amongst his people being enjoyed and enjoying them. The story of the Bible is that we forfeited what he gave us, but God has made a way for it to be restored.

To that end, God raised up and chose the nation of Israel. They replaced Adam and Eve as the representatives of the human race. His design was to use them to bless the world. His plan was to show the world what life could be like if you truly worshiped, trusted and enjoyed the Creator. For His glory and for their good, God established the plans for a tabernacle to be constructed in the middle of the people, where he would live. The tabernacle would be a holy place and the people who were set apart to serve their were a holy people.

Now, please do not lose sight of this. I may be driving you a bit crazy by repeating this, but this is so very, very important for you to remember. The tabernacle was never constructed to be permanent. That is why it was a moveable tent and all of the pieces and parts were built in such a way that they could be transported with ease. The Tabernacle looked back to what was lost in the Garden, and it looked forward to what will be recovered. One day the whole world will be the tabernacle of God. And!!! (this is what our text today is all about) One day, the whole world will be filled with people who are able to live in the presence of God. So, just as the tabernacle looked forward to the day when the earth is restored to what it was originally designed to become, the role of the priest also looked forward to the day when people are restored to what they were originally designed to become as well. However, we are going to see, that the role and function of the high priest accomplished more than that. The priest not only represented what we can become, but he also represented the way by which that is going to be made possible. (repeat)

Opening Observations:

**God set apart specific people to represent the nation of Israel before Him.**

The opening verse of this chapter may have initially sounded pretty special to Aaron and his sons, but upon further reflection it should have been absolutely terrifying. God set these men apart to serve him as priests. These men had to stand before God on behalf of the nation of Israel. As the representatives of the nation they carried on themselves the guilt of the nation. What an impossible position!! Remember how I described for you last week that the tabernacle was the place where heaven had come to earth? How could someone stand between heaven and earth and sufficiently be the connection between the two? How can you be a mediator between One who is infinitely holy and people who are impossibly sinful?! There is no changing of God and there is no hope with these people; and you have to represent them both and somehow bring peace! These people will not stop sinning (and cannot stop sinning) and God will not compromise his holiness. How can you bring peace? Besides, you, as a human priest have your own “issues.”

### **God is very, very particular about his priest.**

This is reflected in the obvious fact that you cannot wear whatever you want in order to appear before God. When you are invited or summoned to an important event or to perform an extremely vital task in a public manner, you give thought to what you are going to wear. The highest possible audience that you could ever have is to be standing before – Almighty God. What would you wear if you were summoned to appear before God?! That is what the OT priests had to do. They had to represent the people before God and they had to represent God to the people. So, what do you wear? You wear what God tells you to wear. And God is very detailed about what his priests are supposed to wear because everything that he commands them to put on has specific meaning. From the text, therefore, it is clear that:

#### **1. The OT Priest had an outfit designed by God.**

##### **A. The Purpose (2)**

For Consecration: These holy garments were sacred, that is “set apart.” They were not to be worn for everyday use. The priest served as a holy person on holy ground and his clothing was a reflection of his work.

For Glory: The word translated “glory” has the idea of “weighty.” When the priest would put on these clothes, they would make him aware of importance of his work.

For Beauty: The high priest was the most elaborately attired man in the nation. His attire consisted of pure white linen, gold, blue, purple and scarlet with ornamentation meticulously crafted. His attire made everyone aware that there was no one else like him in the camp.

##### **B. The Pieces:**

The Ephod (6-14) was a garment that hangs from the shoulders like a vest with a visible means of representing the twelve tribes of Israel on the shoulders (9-10). Note that on

each shoulder was a stone that was set in place. Each stone on the shoulder had six names of the tribes of Israel engraved and these stones were there (v.12) for remembrance.

The Breastpiece (15-30) is described as a breastpiece of judgment. It is not a breastpiece in the sense of a soldier wearing a metal plate for protection. This was a piece of material that covered the front of the chest of the priest and was held in place by gold chains that were connected at the shoulder.

The breastpiece itself also had stones on it. There were twelve that represented a tribe of Israel. Read v.29! It is very clear that the priest (in this case Aaron) was representing the entire nation when he stood before God. At the same time, this article reflected the fact that the priest was to represent God. In the breastpiece was the “Urim and Thummim”. These rather obscure objects were the means that God gave the priests to be able to determine his will on matters. What exactly were they? Well, no one today really knows with absolute certainty although a number of theories certainly abound. Obviously they had to be small enough to fit in the breastpiece. And most scholars believe that they were stones of some kind.

Let’s start with what we know. Urim means “light” and Thummim means “perfection.” Based on all of the places in the OT where the Urim and Thummim are used; such as the selection of Joshua to succeed Moses, King Saul’s attempt to find out the outcome of his battle with the Philistines, David’s request to know whether or not he should attack the Philistines, and Nehemiah’s question on the eligibility of certain men to serve as priests, we can at least conclude the following:

- Permission to inquire of the Lord through the priest using the Urim and Thummim was granted only to the person standing at the head of the people and only on matters of public concern;
- That the inquiry related to matters that human beings could not possibly know, such as an issue regarding the conscience of a person or some matter about the future;
- The question had to be asked in a way so that only one of two answers were possible; yes or no; the first matter or the second;
- Two or more questions could not be asked at the same time; the answer was given to one question only;
- That the reply was given by lot, as the expressions “casting” and “taking” indicate; this was based on the belief that the lot was not a matter of chance, but that God made his “judgment” known thereby, namely, His decision or verdict.

This means of determining the will of God pertained to things that were of national importance and that could not otherwise be known. But I think there is another connection. Now keep this in mind, the tabernacle reflected the Garden of Eden, Christ, the church and the Eternal State. In the Garden of Eden, God lived with his children, Adam and Eve and conversed with them and God obviously revealed things to them. Just as God had revealed things then, God was still giving to his children the direction that they needed in addition to his law. Interestingly enough, the Dead Sea Scrolls “interpret

the Urim and Thummim to have shone gloriously with ‘tongues of fire.’(1Q29) ...“these stones were one of the means by which God’s prophetic revelation came.” The question has always been, how? How did God make his will known? Were these like dice? Did they each have different numbers that when you rolled them, the numbers revealed the answer? Did they have different colors that represented different answers? The Dead Sea Scrolls indicate that these were stones that shone with tongues of fire, which would indicate the message from God. Now, what does that sound like? Isn’t that what happened at Pentecost? The evidence of the Spirit of God coming on his people at the birth of the church is the breaking out of the temple of God (remember the curtain was ripped) unto the ends of the earth beginning at Jerusalem. I think that it is very possible that the tongues of fire phenomenon that rested upon the believers in the upper room was not only a reflection of the lampstand (presence of God) but also the Urim and Thummim (the message of God).

In any case we find that in this one piece (breastpiece) the role of the priest is summarized. He is to represent the people before God, as evidenced by the stones, and he is to discern and communicate the will of God to the people.

The Robe (31-35) was a simple garment of blue with decorative pomegranates and golden bells that alternately hung on the hem. The bells made you aware of the activity of the high priest in the Holy Place. It was also a means by which you knew that he was still alive. There is a warning at the end of v.35 that makes it very clear that this detail was very important. I take this to mean that the particulars about this robe, along with every thing else that the priest wore was very important to God.

The Coat of checker work (39a) – made of linen

The Turban (36-37) had a plate of pure gold attached to it with the inscription “Holy to the Lord” written on it. The priest was marked by God as belonging to God. Later in the law we read that the firstborn male belongs to God. But instead of taking the firstborn from every family, God set apart the tribe of Levi as the substitute. The tribe of priests were all his.

Sash – made of linen (?), embroidered with needlework

### **C. The Materials:**

The materials that were used were linen, and gold, blue, scarlet and purple yarns. The craft to make these garments demanded both jewelry design and embroidered work. This piece required great cost and great skill. Now before anyone comments about the use of blue and gold, don’t forget that there is plenty of scarlet in this as well.

What is missing is anything for the feet. Sandals were to be removed since the ground is holy.

## **2. The OT Priest had an outfit that reflected the Tabernacle.**

The priest was like the Tabernacle personified. His clothing reflected the material of the tabernacle and his outfit reflected the parts of the tabernacle. Just as the tabernacle reflected the original creation, this outfit reflected both the tabernacle and what the tabernacle was designed to reflect. For example, the outer court of the tabernacle (the bronze part that reflected the earth) was captured in the pomegranates that symbolized both the garden and the fertile earth. The blue robe, like the sky was punctuated by the stones that reflected the stars and the square breastpiece would of course reflect the perfectly square holy of holies, where God revealed himself, which was seen in the Urim and Thummim.

The priest and the tabernacle were made for each other and they corresponded together perfectly. However, the priest had an impossible job in that it was never done. God would never cease to be absolutely holy and the people would never stop sinning. The best the priest could do is hold off the judgment of God for just a little bit longer. Why does God spend so much time detailing this? All of this pointed to Christ.

### **3. The OT Priest was perfectly fulfilled in Christ.**

What would it take to be a perfect priest? A perfect priest had to be one of the people that he was called to represent. That is why Christ had to be born into this world as one of us. Like the OT priest he was “from among” them. A perfect priest had to be able to totally represent the people. This certainly meant that he would and could empathize with them, but if he was going to be perfect it would also mean that he would be one who would be able to bring before God every single sin that they have ever and will ever commit. But, if one priest would be able somehow to bear all of that upon himself and then bring that much sin before God in the holy of holies, that priest would be consumed by God’s righteous anger, unless of course the priest would be able to offer a sacrifice of such infinite merit that it atoned for all of that sin and both absorbed and appeased the wrath of God.

Now bull or lamb or goat or animal of any kind could do that. So, day after day after day, the priest offered sacrifices that held at bay the righteous wrath of God against sin. All of this anticipated the day when Christ would invade our world and would stand between heaven and earth. As man, he could and would be our representative and our substitute. As God, he would be our perfect and infinitely sufficient sacrifice.

Jesus was the priest who offered the perfect sacrifice. He said, no one takes my life, I give it freely. But as the priest he offered himself as the sacrifice. He was both offerer and offering. **Hebrews 10.11-14**

Do you know what this means? This means that when you trust in him as your full and final sacrifice, as your priest, as your substitute as your redeemer, as your King, his death is credited as having been offered in your place. His life is credited to you as having been lived in your place. His life is now your righteousness.

So, what do you have to wear when you are summoned to stand before God? If you are wearing the clothes that you have made out of your good works and noble needs, they will not be good enough. If you are wearing the hand-me-down clothes of your parent's religion, it will not be good enough. If you are wearing the clothes of religion deeds, and ceremonies it will not be good enough. Take off those unworthy and sin-stained clothes. Trust in Christ! "Dressed in his righteousness alone, faultless to stand before the throne!"

And this high priest who died for you is the same high priest who continually stands in your place. Our great High Priest stands between us and the Father, and like the names on the shoulders and on the breastpiece, he carries you on his shoulders and keeps you close to his heart.

Concl.

One day the whole world will be the tabernacle of God. And, one day, the whole world will be filled with people who are able to live in the presence of God. So, just as the tabernacle looked forward to the day when the earth is restored to what it was originally designed to become, the role of the priest also looked forward to the day when people are restored to what they were originally designed to become as well. The priest not only represented what we can become, but he also represented the way by which that is going to be made possible.

The OT priest was a picture (a promise if you will) of what Christ would do and what we will become. Christ combined the office of king and priest. God kept those separate in the OT, because no human could handle that. But in Christ they are combined. So, when we say that one day we will be like Christ, what exactly does that mean? It means that we will be royalty that reigns and priests who serve. We not only serve a great High Priest who Reigns, we serve the King who Redeemed us. One day we will reflect him. And now, we are to live in a way that anticipates that day.

1 Peter 2.9  
Rev. 1.4-6  
Rev. 5.9-10

How can you rule this week in a way that reflects that day? Has God given you a position of influence or authority that you can use to put on display the character of the true King? Has God given you opportunities to serve that you can empathize with the ones you are called to help? None of us did it perfectly this week and we need the ongoing ministry of our great high priest.

Arise my soul Arise #199.

Adopted from Cassuto, A Commentary on the Book of Exodus p. 379-380  
Beale, The Temple and the Church's Mission, p. 207