

Exodus Chapter 28

Exodus 28:1 "And take thou unto thee Aaron thy brother, and his sons with him, from among the children of Israel, that he may minister unto me in the priest's office, [even] Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar, Aaron's sons."

“Minister unto me in the priest’s office”: The 3-fold repetition of this phrase in the opening words about Aaron’s priestly wardrobe would appear to stress the importance of his role in the religious life of the nation. Aaron’s sons were part of the priesthood being set up. The Hebrew text groups the sons in two pairs, the first pair being Nadab and Abihu, both of whom died because of wanton disregard of God’s instructions (Lev. 10:1-2). Aaron and his descendants, as well as the tribe of Levi, were selected by God to be Israel’s priests, they did not appoint themselves to the position. The law clearly defined their duties for worship and the sacrifices in the tabernacle and for the individual worshiper and the nation’s covenantal relationship to God.

The preparation for formally establishing Israel’s priesthood begins here. “Aaron” and his “sons” were appointed by Yahweh. Their principal function, according to the Lord, was to “minister unto Me”, through the administration of the temple and its sacrifices. From this point forward, all true priests in Israel were to be descended from Aaron’s line (Heb. 5:4).

God was telling Moses, to separate Aaron and his sons for priests for the temple of God. Notice also, that Aaron was to minister to God. The job of a high priest was two-fold. Not only was he to present himself as a representative of God to the people, but was to represent the people to God once a year on Day of Atonement.

"Abihu" means worshipper. "Nadab" means liberal. "Eleazar" means God is helper. "Ithamar" means coast of the palm tree.

Verses 2-39: The priestly “garments” were made by “gifted artisans” and included some of the same materials as the curtains of the tabernacle (28:8, 15, 33, 39, 42), plus gold and precious stones (28:17-20). The high priest’s clothing signified dignity and honor (28:40), and served as a constant reminder of the Lord’s holiness.

Exodus 28:2 "And thou shalt make holy garments for Aaron thy brother for glory and for beauty."

“For glory and for beauty”: The garments were designed to exalt the office and function of the priesthood, vividly marking out Aaron as a special person playing a special mediatorial role. Instructions to Moses that certain men would be especially empowered by Him to work skillfully on this construction project.

God was explaining that Aaron, the high priest, must not dress just any old way. This garment should be beautiful, not only to please Aaron, but to please God. These garments would be worn

by Aaron for a specific purpose. These garments had a meaning. This glory was to separate Aaron from the people. They would know just by his dress that he was the high priest. These were not to be just regular clothing.

Exodus 28:3 "And thou shalt speak unto all [that are] wise hearted, whom I have filled with the spirit of wisdom, that they may make Aaron's garments to consecrate him, that he may minister unto me in the priest's office."

That have knowledge and understanding in mechanic arts, particularly in making garments. And it required men of more than ordinary skill to be employed in making these, because they were uncommon ones, and required a good deal of thought and judgment. And care and application, to make them exactly as they should be.

“Whom I have filled with the spirit of wisdom”; for besides a common understanding of things, these required a peculiar gift from God, which some men, as Bezaleel and Aholiab had.

"That they may make Aaron's garments, to consecrate him": To put upon him at the time of his consecration; and indeed this was one way, by which, as well as by sacrifices, that he was consecrated (see Exodus 29:1).

“That he may minister unto me in the priest's office": For the priests, without having these garments on, might not minister in their office. For when these garments were off, as they were when they were out of their service, they were as other men, as laymen (see note on Ezek. 42:14).

Some in the families of the Israelites had been specially gifted with the knowledge and skill by God to make this garment for Aaron. It must be made precisely to specifications. "Consecrate" means to set aside or sanctify.

Exodus 28:4 "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: and they shall make holy garments for Aaron thy brother, and his sons, that he may minister unto me in the priest's office."

The garments peculiar to the high priest are taken first, and described with great elaboration in thirty-six verses (4-39). The most conspicuous was the breastplate, (described in Exodus 28:13-30), and here mentioned first of all. Next to this came the peculiar vestment called the “ephod,” a sort of jerkin or waistcoat, upon which the breastplate was worn (described in Exodus 28:6-12). Under the ephod was the long robe of blue, called “the robe of the ephod,” which may be considered as the main garment, and which is described (in Exodus 28:31-35). Upon his head the high priest wore a “mitre” or turban (described in Exodus 28:36-38). And inside his “robe” he wore a linen shirt or tunic, secured by a girdle (Exodus 28:39). Underneath the tunic, he wore linen drawers (Exodus 28:42-43). Nothing is said as to any covering for his feet; but it is probable that they were protected by sandals.

"And they shall make holy garments for Aaron thy brother, and his sons": As those before mentioned, with some others not mentioned. Some for Aaron only, and others that were to be worn by his sons also.

"That he may minister unto me in the priest's office": These were necessary to the execution of the priestly office, and an essential qualification for it, and without which it was not lawful to serve in it.

These were the separate items that Aaron was to wear. They were not necessarily in the order he would put them on. In (chapter 6 of Ephesians), we see the garment that Christians are to be clothed in. If we carefully look at the two, we can probably see some comparisons.

Ephesians 6:13-17 "Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand." "Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness;" "And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace;" "Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked." "And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God:"

You see, both have a breastplate, both have a head piece and both have something about the feet; to mention a few. As we go on, I believe we will be able to see more similarities.

Verses 5-13: "Ephod": Whenever Aaron entered the sanctuary; he carried with him on his shoulders the badge and the engraved stones that were representative of the 12 tribes.

Exodus 28:5 "And they shall take gold, and blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine linen."

Except for the gold, the materials were the same as those of the tabernacle cloth. The veil of the tabernacle and the entrance curtain of the tent (Exodus 26:1; 26:31; 26:36; 25:4). The gold was made into thin flat wires which could either be woven with the woolen and linen threads, or worked with the needle. Regarding the mixture of linen and woolen threads in the High priest's dress (see Lev. 19:19).

Verses 6-21: The "ephod" was a two-part, sleeveless outer garment that covered the priest's upper body. The names of Israel's 12 tribes were engraved on the "stones" at the shoulders so that as Aaron entered the tabernacle, he would bear Israel's "names" before the Lord. Aaron's "breastplate" bore 12 precious gems. Each "stone" was also inscribed with the name of one of the "sons of Israel," showing that the priest represented all 12 tribes.

Exodus 28:6 "And they shall make the ephod [of] gold, [of] blue, and [of] purple, [of] scarlet, and fine twined linen, with cunning work."

“The ephod” (Exodus 39:2-7). The Hebrew word has the same breadth of meaning as our word vestment. The garment was worn over the shoulders, and was the distinctive vestment of the High priest, to which "the breast-plate of judgment" was attached (Exodus 28:25-28).

"Cunning work": Skilled work, or work of a skilled man (Exodus 35:35).

This "ephod" was kind of like an over garment. This was made of the fine linen and colored linen of blue, purple and scarlet. This was the garment the breastplate would fit over. This was held together on the shoulders by the two onyx clasps. The material was sewn by gold thread which held it together. This beautiful, thin, pure gold thread was what it was sewn with.

Exodus 39:3 “And they did beat the gold into thin plates, and cut [it into] wires, to work [it] in the blue, and in the purple, and in the scarlet, and in the fine linen, [with] cunning work.”

This gold interwoven in this garment made it beautiful.

Exodus 28:7 "It shall have the two shoulderpieces thereof joined at the two edges thereof; and [so] it shall be joined together."

Compare (Exodus 39:4). The ephod consisted of two principal pieces of cloth, one for the back and the other for the front, joined together by shoulder straps (see note on Exodus 28:27). Below the arms, probably just above the hips, the two pieces were kept in place by a band attached to one of the pieces. On the respect in which the ephod of the High priest was held (see 1 Sam. 2:28; 14:3; 21:9; 23:6-9; 30:7). But an ephod made of linen appears to have been a recognized garment not only for the common priests (1 Sam. 22:18), but also for those who were even temporarily engaged in the service of the sanctuary (1 Sam. 2:18; 2 Sam. 6:14; 1 Chron. 15:27).

Exodus 28:8 "And the curious girdle of the ephod, which [is] upon it, shall be of the same, according to the work thereof; [even of] gold, [of] blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine twined linen."

Which was worn along with it; and went out from it like two thongs, as Jarchi says; which girt the ephod close to the back and breast.

"Shall be of the same": Of the same matter as the ephod, and woven in the same manner, and together with it.

"According to the work thereof": wrought with the same colored, curious, and cunning work.

"Even of gold, of blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine twined linen": And from the gold in it, it was called a golden girdle, to distinguish it from others. And with it the priest was girt under the arm holes about the paps, to which the allusion is (Rev. 1:13). And is an emblem of the close union of the human nature of Christ to his divine which is the effect of his love to his people. Which, as it is seen in his incarnation, so more especially in his sufferings and death. And it may denote his strength to do his work as a priest, his readiness to perform it, and his faithfulness and integrity in it. Righteousness being the girdle of his loins; and faithfulness the girdle of his reins.

Exodus 28:9 "And thou shalt take two onyx stones, and grave on them the names of the children of Israel:"

Two onyx stones. The correctness of this rendering has been much disputed. The LXX give "emerald (meaning green in color)" as the Greek equivalent in the present passage, while many argue for the beryl (Winer, Rosenmuller, Bollermann and others), for the sardonyx. This last rendering has the support of Josephus and Aquila. The sardonyx is, in fact, nothing but the best kind of onyx, differing from the onyx by having three layers - black, white, and red - instead of two, black and white only.

The probability is, that it is the stone here intended. It is an excellent material for engraving. With respect to the possibility of Moses having in the congregation persons who could engrave the sardonyx, we may remark that the Egyptians cut stones quite as hard, from a date long earlier to the exodus.

“Grave on them the names of the children of Israel”: Egyptian names are frequently found engraved on rings and amulets in hard stone. These rings and amulets date from the time of the twelfth dynasty. The names here intended are evidently the Israelite tribe names, which are reckoned as twelve, the double tribe of Joseph counting as one only (compare Num. 1:10; Deut. 33:13-17).

Exodus 28:10 "Six of their names on one stone, and [the other] six names of the rest on the other stone, according to their birth."

The names of the six eldest on the stone upon the right shoulder.

"And the other six names of the rest on the other stone": The names of the six youngest on the stone upon the left shoulder; for these stones, as afterwards said, were put on the shoulders of the priests.

According to their birth; the order of it": So that upon the first stone were engraved the names of Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Dan, and Naphtali; and on the second stone the names of Gad, Asher, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph, and Benjamin; and so they are disposed by Jarchi, with whom Josephus agrees.

We need to take another look at this garment of linen (blue, purple, and red), sewn together with this beautiful 24 karat hammered gold thread. This garment and the girdle of the ephod were both of the same material. In fact, it was difficult to separate the two as they were part of the same garment. The Hebrew word translated "onyx", means to shine with the luster of fire. This was a very precious stone to have this brilliance and is not the same stone we call onyx today.

This stone on each side of the shoulder was mounted in pure gold and the stone on each shoulder was engraved with six of the twelve tribes of Israel. Both stones together carried all the names of the children of Israel. Aaron carried the names of all the tribes on his shoulders. This girdle of the ephod probably held the garment close enough so as to spiritually make it a part of the high priest's body.

Exodus 28:11 "With the work of an engraver in stone, [like] the engravings of a signet, shalt thou engrave the two stones with the names of the children of Israel: thou shalt make them to be set in ouches of gold."

The names of the six eldest on the stone upon the right shoulder.

"And the other six names of the rest on the other stone: the names of the six youngest on the stone upon the left shoulder; for these stones, as afterwards said, were put on the shoulders of the priests.

According to their birth; the order of it": So that upon the first stone were engraved the names of Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Dan, and Naphtali; and on the second stone the names of Gad, Asher, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph, and Benjamin. And so they are disposed by Jarchi, with whom Josephus agrees.

These names were on these stones like a signet on a ring. The family name had an initial or a symbol that left no doubt which of the twelve tribes it was. One of the things (on the high priest's shoulder), indicates the responsibility of the pastor for his congregation. The weight of the church falls upon the shoulder of the pastor.

Exodus 28:12 "And thou shalt put the two stones upon the shoulders of the ephod [for] stones of memorial unto the children of Israel: and Aaron shall bear their names before the LORD upon his two shoulders for a memorial."

Rather, for the children of Israel. The intention was that the stones should be "stones of memorial" to God, on behalf of Israel; should remind God that the high priest represented all the tribes, and pleaded before Him on their behalf, and in their name. The tribes were represented doubly in the costume of the high priest, by the onyx stones and by the stones of the breastplate.

"And Aaron shall bear their names before the Lord upon his two shoulders for a memorial": Signifying his presentation of them to the Lord when he appeared before him on the mercy seat. His intercession for them, and his patient bearing all their infirmities and weaknesses. In which he was a type of Christ, who presents all his people to his divine Father, makes intercession for them, and bears all their burdens, the care and government of them being upon his shoulders (Isa. 9:6).

These "stones of memorial" here, just meant that Aaron was not just representing himself when he appeared before God, but was in fact representing himself and all the children of the twelve tribes of Israel.

Exodus 28:13 "And thou shalt make ouches [of] gold;"

"Buttons" or "rosettes" of similar open-work to that which formed the setting of the onyx stones upon the shoulders of the ephod (Exodus 28:11). These "buttons" must have been sewn on to the ephod.

This just means that the stones that bore the names of six tribes on each shoulder were set in a gold mount. Gold meaning "God", shows us that He was right there with them as long as they were stayed in Him.

Exodus 28:14 "And two chains [of] pure gold at the ends; [of] wreathen work shalt thou make them, and fasten the wreathen chains to the ouches."

The use of which was to hang the breast plate on, after described. One end of them was fastened to rings on the ouches in the shoulder pieces, and the other end to rings on the breastplate, and thus it hung.

"Of wreathen work shall thou make them": These chains were not made after the manner of circles or ringlets coupled together, as chains usually are, but of golden wires twisted together as a rope is twisted.

"And fasten the wreathen chains to the ouches": To the ouches on the shoulder pieces of the ephod, in which the onyx stones were set, very probably to rings that were in these ouches.

These chains would be connected to the ouches and the breastplate to secure the breastplate to the garment of the high priest.

Verses 15-30: "Breastplate of judgment": The 12 precious stones, each engraved with a tribe's name, colorfully and ornately displayed Aaron's representative role of intercession for the tribes before the Lord. The breastplate was to be securely fastened to the ephod so as not to come loose from it (verse 28; 39:21). Thus, to speak of the ephod after this was done would be to speak of the whole ensemble.

Exodus 28:15 "And thou shalt make the breastplate of judgment with cunning work; after the work of the ephod thou shalt make it; [of] gold, [of] blue, and [of] purple, and [of] scarlet, and [of] fine twined linen, shalt thou make it."

The word khoshen does not really signify "breastplate," but "ornament." It was the main ornament of the priestly attire. It was called "the ornament of judgment" on account of its containing the Urim and Thummim, whereby God's "judgments" were made known to His people (see Note on Exodus 28:30).

"With cunning work": Rather, of the work of the weaver (compare Exodus 26:1; 26:31; 28:6).

"Of gold, of blue, and of purple, and of scarlet, and of fine twined linen, shalt thou make it": A piece of stuff interwoven with threads of gold, or golden wires, and with threads of yarn, of blue, purple, and scarlet colors. And with threads of fine twined linen six times doubled. All which may signify the beautiful array of the saints, with the several graces of the Spirit. And especially their being clothed with fine linen, called the righteousness of the saints. That raiment of

needlework, and clothing of wrought gold, the righteousness of Christ, consisting of his obedience, sufferings, and death, fitly expressed by these various colors.

This breastplate was like an ornament. In fact, that is what the original word translated breastplate means. The Greek word for breastplate is translated oracle. We find that the breastplate was made of this same fine twined linen; woven with blue, red, and purple that was used in the ephod.

Exodus 28:16 "Foursquare it shall be [being] doubled; a span [shall be] the length thereof, and a span [shall be] the breadth thereof."

It was doubled for greater strength that it might better support and secure the precious stones which were put into it, and that it might receive the Urim and Thummim (Lev. 8:8).

This was a square piece to be worn in the center of the front. This was doubled to make a kind of pouch at the back called the Urim and Thummim. I believe this Urim and Thummim held a stone engraved with the unspeakable name of God on it; next to the heart, under the breastplate. "Urim" means lights or fire and "Thummim" means perfections. We will see by this that God speaks through the heart.

Exodus 28:17 "And thou shalt set in it settings of stones, [even] four rows of stones: [the first] row [shall be] a sardius, a topaz, and a carbuncle: [this shall be] the first row."

Or "fill in it fillings of stones"; which shows that there were in it ouches, or sockets of gold, the hollows of which were to be filled up with precious stones.

"Even four rows of stones": Making a four square, and so filling up the measure of the breastplate.

"The first row shall be a sardius, a topaz, and a carbuncle": About these stones, and those that follow, there is a great variety of interpretations of them, both among Jews and Christians; and they seem to be little known.

Exodus 28:18 "And the second row [shall be] an emerald, a sapphire, and a diamond."

"An emerald": Rather the garnet, which when cut with a convex face is termed the carbuncle.

"A sapphire": Not the stone now called the sapphire; the lapis-lazuli is most probably meant.

"A diamond": There is no trace of evidence that the ancients ever acquired the skill to engrave on the diamond, or even that they were acquainted with the stone. The "diamond" here may possibly be some variety of chalcedony, or (perhaps) rock crystal.

Exodus 28:19 "And the third row a figure, an agate, and an amethyst."

The term "ligure" is unknown in modern mineralogy; and it is to the last degree uncertain what stone the ancients intended by their *lingurium* or *lapis ligurius*. Some think that "jacinth," others that "tourmaline," is the stone here meant. A few suggest amber, but amber cannot receive an engraving.

"Agate" and "amethyst" are generally allowed to be right translations.

Exodus 28:20 "And the fourth row a beryl, and an onyx, and a jasper: they shall be set in gold in their enclosings."

If the identifications above suggested are allowed, two at least of these translations must be rejected. We have supposed the third stone in the first row to have been the "beryl," and the third in the second the "onyx." Perhaps we should translate, "a turquoise, a sardonyx, and a jasper" (see comment on verse 9), their enclosings, rather, "their settings," as (in verse 17).

Exodus 28:21 "And the stones shall be with the names of the children of Israel, twelve, according to their names, [like] the engravings of a signet; every one with his name shall they be according to the twelve tribes."

Rather, the stones shall be "according to their names" etc., the twelve, neither more nor fewer.

Every one with his name": Rather, each stone, according to its name (i.e., the name engraved upon it), shall be (or stand for), one of the twelve tribes.

We see that this square breastplate had four rows of three stones each. These stones were set down in little gold holders. Each stone had one name of one of the tribes of Israel engraved in the stone. The mark or signet signified which tribe it represented. This breastplate's position over the heart tells us that the high priest had all the people on his heart all the time. We talked earlier about the Urim and Thummim being inside this breastplate. The stones in various colors probably had some significant reason and meaning. Each family possibly had a stone or color or both, that represented, along with their signet, their tribe. These perhaps, were not the same names these stones are known by in our society today. Since we are unsure of any further meaning, we will not belabor this point. We are all precious stones to the Lord.

Exodus 28:22 "And thou shalt make upon the breastplate chains at the ends [of] wreathen work [of] pure gold."

One end of them to be put to the breastplate and the other end to the ouches on the shoulder pieces of the ephod; by which the breastplate hung from. The Targum of Jonathan renders it, chains of a certain determined size, of length and thickness exactly alike. Or terminable ones, as it may be rendered, not circular like a locket, or chain of gold worn about the neck, but that had ends to it. Some interpret it chains, made like ropes, in the same manner as cables are, twisted together; and such it is certain they were, by what follows.

"Of wreathen work of pure gold": Not of circles and ringlets of gold coupled together, but of golden wires twisted together, as ropes are.

Exodus 28:23 "And thou shalt make upon the breastplate two rings of gold, and shalt put the two rings on the two ends of the breastplate."

Meaning; on the two upper corners of the breastplate. The chains were to be passed through the two rings, which they were then to unite with the "ouches" of the ephod (see Exodus 28:13-14).

Exodus 28:24 "And thou shalt put the two wreathen [chains] of gold in the two rings [which are] on the ends of the breastplate."

This expresses both how many chains were to be made, which is not before said, and the use of them, or where they were to be put, as well as the use of the rings.

"Which are on the ends of the breastplate": The two uppermost ends or corners of it.

Exodus 28:25 "And [the other] two ends of the two wreathen [chains] thou shalt fasten in the two ouches, and put [them] on the shoulderpieces of the ephod before it."

In which the two onyx stones were set on the shoulder pieces of the ephod, and were as buttons to them. Probably there were rings to those ouches, into which these ends of the wreathen chains of gold, reaching from the breastplate, were put. Or however, by some means or other they were fastened to these ouches or sockets.

"And put them in the shoulder pieces of the ephod before it": That is, on the ouches upon them, as before observed: into that part or side of the ouches which was to be the fore part of the ephod. So that the breastplate hung by these chains from the shoulder pieces of the ephod, on the fore part of it, upon the breast of the high priest.

Exodus 28:26 "And thou shalt make two rings of gold, and thou shalt put them upon the two ends of the breastplate in the border thereof, which [is] in the side of the ephod inward."

Two other rings besides those before mentioned.

"And thou shalt put them upon the two ends of the breastplate": On the other two ends or corners of it.

"In the border thereof which is in the side of the ephod inward": These were at the two lower ends of the breastplate, towards the ephod on the inside.

Exodus 28:27 "And two [other] rings of gold thou shalt make, and shalt put them on the two sides of the ephod underneath, toward the forepart thereof, over against the [other] coupling thereof, above the curious girdle of the ephod."

Two gold rings were also to be sewn on to the ephod, low down and in front, so as just to appear above the "curious girdle of the ephod," and the lower rings of the breastplate were to be laced to

these rings by a “lace of blue.” The breastplate was thus securely attached to the ephod, and showed above the “curious girdle” without covering it.

We see that these chains of gold connected the ephod, breastplate and ouches together. The chain that binds the church and its people together is of God. This chain from the ouches went through the rings and connected all the garments.

Exodus Chapter 28 Questions

1. Who did God tell Moses to set aside for the priesthood?
2. Name them.
3. What two jobs did the high priest have?
4. Who was the only one who could enter into the Holy of Holies?
5. What does "Abihu" mean?
6. What does "Nadab" mean?
7. What does "Eleazar" mean?
8. "Ithamar" means what?
9. What two things did the holy garments stand for?
10. Who was to make the garment of the priest?
11. What six things were they to make?
12. Where do we find the instructions on the garment Christians are to wear?
13. What is the sword of the Spirit?
14. What shall the ephod be made of?
15. What was the thread made of?
16. What was on the shoulders?
17. What was engraved on the onyx?
18. The word translated "onyx" means what?
19. What was the girdle like?

20. What was the engraving in the stones like?
21. What does the fact that these stones were carried on the high priest's shoulder mean to us today?
22. What did these stones of memorials mean?
23. What was the purpose of the two chains?
24. The breastplate was like an _____.
25. The Greek word for breastplate means what?
26. Where were the Urim and Thummim?
27. What does "Urim" mean?
28. What does "Thummim" mean?
29. What was the shape of the breastplate?
30. How were the stones on the breastplate arranged?
31. What was a descriptive word used describing the girdle?