

DEVOTIONAL 6



GOD IN OUR MIDST

EXODUS 28:1-5, 21, 29-30, 29:1-2, 10-12, 19-21, 35-36

^{28:1} “Then bring near to you Aaron your brother, and his sons with him, from among the people of Israel, to serve me as priests— Aaron and Aaron’s sons, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar. ² And you shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother, for glory and for beauty. ³ You shall speak to all the skillful, whom I have filled with a spirit of skill, that they make Aaron’s garments to consecrate him for my priesthood. ⁴ These are the garments that they shall make: a breastpiece, an ephod, a robe, a coat of checker work, a turban, and a sash. They shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother and his sons to serve me as priests. ⁵ They shall receive gold, blue and purple and scarlet yarns, and fine twined linen.

²¹ There shall be twelve stones with their names according to the names of the sons of Israel. They shall be like signets, each engraved with its name, for the twelve tribes.

²⁹ So Aaron shall bear the names of the sons of Israel in the breastpiece of judgment on his heart, when he goes into the Holy Place, to bring them to regular remembrance before the LORD. ³⁰ And in the breastpiece of judgment you shall put the Urim and the Thummim, and they shall be on Aaron’s heart, when he goes in before the LORD. Thus Aaron shall bear the judgment of the people of Israel on his heart before the LORD regularly.

^{29:1} “Now this is what you shall do to them to consecrate them, that they may serve me as priests. Take one bull of the herd and two rams without blemish, ² and unleavened bread, unleavened cakes mixed with oil, and unleavened wafers smeared with oil. You shall make them of fine wheat flour.

¹⁰ “Then you shall bring the bull before the tent of meeting. Aaron and his sons shall lay their hands on the head of the bull. ¹¹ Then you shall kill the bull before the LORD at the entrance of the tent of meeting, ¹² and shall take part of the blood of the bull and put it on the horns of the altar with your finger, and the rest of the blood you shall pour out at the base of the altar.

¹⁹ “You shall take the other ram, and Aaron and his sons shall lay their hands on the head of the ram, ²⁰ and you shall kill the ram and take part of its blood and put it on the tip of the right ear of Aaron and on the tips of the right ears of his sons, and on the thumbs of their right hands and on the great toes of their right feet, and throw the rest of the blood against the sides of the altar. ²¹ Then you shall take part of the blood that is on the altar, and of the anointing oil, and sprinkle it on Aaron and his garments, and on his sons and his sons’ garments with him. He and his garments shall be holy, and his sons and his sons’ garments with him.

³⁵ “Thus you shall do to Aaron and to his sons, according to all that I have commanded you. Through seven days shall you ordain them, ³⁶ and every day you shall offer a bull as a sin offering for atonement. Also you shall purify the altar, when you make atonement for it, and shall anoint it to consecrate it.

DAY 1

EXODUS 28:1-5

¹Then bring near to you Aaron your brother, and his sons with him, from among the people of Israel, to serve me as priests—Aaron and Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar. ²And you shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother, for glory and for beauty. ³You shall speak to all the skillful, whom I have filled with a spirit of skill, that they make Aaron's garments to consecrate him for my priesthood. ⁴These are the garments that they shall make: a breastpiece, an ephod, a robe, a coat of checker work, a turban, and a sash. They shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother and his sons to serve me as priests. ⁵They shall receive gold, blue and purple and scarlet yarns, and fine twined linen.

One of the truths we noted last week in looking at the tabernacle was that its design, materials, and purpose was to recapture the imagination of the worshiper to see the world through God's eyes. As one gazed on the tabernacle and participated in its worship, one was invited to be drawn into the story that saw YHWH as the key and decisive being in the universe. What is interesting is that the priests, the tabernacle attendants, were to be walking versions of this tabernacle.

We see this most clearly in the clothing that the priests wear. Essentially, there are three layers: ephod, breastpiece, and robe, corresponding to the three zones in the tabernacle: outer courts, holy place, holy of holies. The material and craftsmanship are identical, using the same fine twined linen and colors. What is the significance of this? Already here in the Old Testament God is communicating that his presence is not just contained to place, but also will reside in a person. The priest, as the walking tabernacle, points to the presence of God. Later we will see that the hems of the robes are adorned with bells (Ex. 28:34) to remind the people of the presence of the priest, the presence of God.

As we approach these OT truths, we are reminded that God's people were always to be a nation of priests (cf. Ex. 19:6; Is. 61:6; 1 Peter 2:9; Rev. 1:6). Now that Christ has fulfilled the imagery of the tabernacle and the role of the priest and taken up his residence within the hearts of believers (John 16:7; Acts 2), our call is to be priests to the world, living such grace-adorned lives that they capture the imaginations of those around us. In this way, we too are to become walking tabernacles.

PRAYER

Father, thank you for calling us out of darkness and into the light. Thank you for making your dwelling place with us and for robing us in the beauty of Christ's righteousness. Help us to be your priests to the nations, proclaiming your excellencies and pointing to your glory. We pray all of this through Jesus, our great High Priest. Amen

DAY 2

EXODUS 28:6-14, 29

⁶ “And they shall make the ephod of gold, of blue and purple and scarlet yarns, and of fine twined linen, skillfully worked. ⁷ It shall have two shoulder pieces attached to its two edges, so that it may be joined together. ⁸ And the skillfully woven band on it shall be made like it and be of one piece with it, of gold, blue and purple and scarlet yarns, and fine twined linen. ⁹ You shall take two onyx stones, and engrave on them the names of the sons of Israel, ¹⁰ six of their names on the one stone, and the names of the remaining six on the other stone, in the order of their birth. ¹¹ As a jeweler engraves signets, so shall you engrave the two stones with the names of the sons of Israel. You shall enclose them in settings of gold filigree. ¹² And you shall set the two stones on the shoulder pieces of the ephod, as stones of remembrance for the sons of Israel. And Aaron shall bear their names before the Lord on his two shoulders for remembrance. ¹³ You shall make settings of gold filigree, ¹⁴ and two chains of pure gold, twisted like cords; and you shall attach the corded chains to the settings.

²⁹ So Aaron shall bear the names of the sons of Israel in the breastpiece of judgment on his heart, when he goes into the Holy Place, to bring them to regular remembrance before the Lord.

All of us know what it means to represent someone. Whether that be our parents, through the status of being a son or daughter; a particular business, as an employee; or, most importantly, the name of Christ, as we follow Jesus. But what does it mean to represent someone? When we are representing someone or something, we are authorized delegates or agents of that entity. In other words, we are given the official seal—sometimes literal, sometimes not—that takes their name into the world so that when people look at us, they see whom we are representing. Where does this authority come from? Perhaps it’s through the title: son of James, daughter of Susie; Associate Pastor at Christ Church; receptionist at Lake Michigan Credit Union. The authority comes from our official position. So it is true for the high priests. They bear the names of the twelve tribes of Israel.

“And you shall set the two stones on the shoulder pieces of the ephod, as stones of remembrance for the sons of Israel. And Aaron shall bear their names before the LORD on his two shoulders for remembrance.” v.12

It's Aaron's and all high priests' official position before the LORD that grants them this burden of representation. They, as the high priests of Israel—called and set aside by God the Father—are to represent the people of Israel before God, and God before the people. This, of course, would remind them of Adam and Eve. Called by God to represent humanity before him, and him to humanity, they were the first “high priests” on the scene. This pattern was set long ago and was made official and carried through Aaron all the way to Jesus, our great High Priest. Jesus is the great mediator, the great representative, the great go-between for God and humanity. So the question before us is this: Do we follow and trust our great High Priest with every fiber of our being? He represents us before the Father, and through the same mercy and grace that conquered the grave, he invites us into the best place that exists, where we are both represented by Jesus and where we represent Jesus Christ the King to the world.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, what a marvelous gift it is that Jesus, our great High Priest, has paid the price for our sin and salvation. Taking away our sin on the cross and giving us his righteousness, we were bought with a hefty price. Might we see the place we have been given—a place that is both represented by Jesus as our mediator and also where we represent him as our Savior. Help us to humbly submit to King Jesus all our life, for it is better to be placed under him than anywhere else. It is in the high and lifted name of Jesus, I pray. Amen.

DAY 3

EXODUS 28:30

“And in the breastpiece of judgment you shall put the Urim and the Thummim, and they shall be on Aaron’s heart, when he goes in before the LORD. Thus Aaron shall bear the judgment of the people of Israel on his heart before the LORD regularly.”

There are several well-known “mysteries” in the Bible. As we come to Exodus 28 and some of the buildout for the priest, we encounter one of those mysteries—the Urim and the Thummim. These appear to be a pair of stones, or maybe multiple stones, that were used in seeking the will of the Lord. In the text, the word that is used is “judgment,” which we should not simply see as a negative pronouncement but rather a discerning choice in an ambiguous situation. We have a good example of the use of Urim and Thummim in 1 Samuel 14:41: “Therefore Saul said, ‘O LORD God of Israel, why have you not answered your servant this day? If this guilt is in me or in Jonathan my son, O LORD, God of Israel, give Urim. But if this guilt is in your people Israel, give Thummim.’ And Jonathan and Saul were taken, but the people escaped.” Urim seems to be the black stone, curses. While Thummim seems to be the white stone, perfections.

For all the mystery surrounding the stones and their use, what is really significant is that God makes this provision and visualizes this for us on the person of the priest. As the priest is given what he needs to provide discernment into the ambiguous, so we today as the “kingdom of priests” are given what we need for discernment. We know that Jesus is the Wonderful Counselor (Is. 9:6). We know that the new covenant is one where the law is written on our hearts (Jer 31:33; Heb. 8:10). We know that the Holy Spirit is bestowed on the followers of Christ (John 16:7; Acts 2). We no longer need the Urim and the Thummim, for we are equipped to carry out our priestly duties to the world before the face of the Lord through the Word and prayer.

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, our Great High Priest, thank you that you have equipped us to be your priests to the world by giving us the Holy Spirit, who reveals to us the discernment of the law. We pray that we might keep our eyes on you even as we seek to be faithful to your call. In the name of our Wonderful Counselor, Amen.

DAY 4

EXODUS 28:2-3, 40

² “And you shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother, for glory and for beauty. ³ You shall speak to all the skillful, whom I have filled with a spirit of skill, that they make Aaron’s garments to consecrate him for my priesthood.”

⁴⁰ “For Aaron’s sons you shall make coats and sashes and caps. You shall make them for glory and beauty.”

Two times in Exodus 28 we see the phrase “for glory and for beauty” (vv. 2, 40) used to describe the ceremonial clothing of Aaron and his sons. Why is all this elaborate clothing necessary? What is holy about a piece of cloth? Isn’t clothing adorned with jewels over the top? What is God trying to tell the Israelites?

We get to some answers to these questions by understanding the purpose of the tabernacle and in looking at some other passages of scripture. The biblical priests are God’s representatives in the community. They represented God’s presence as they stood before them. The priests fit within the whole framework of the tabernacle, which was God’s dwelling place. The garments of the priest sought to communicate some of the mystery, glory, and beauty of the holy place and God himself. Like the tabernacle, the priestly garments pointed to this God who was being newly experienced by the people of Israel.

The Israelites needed to have their imaginations expanded. In Egypt, they heard about gods that were confined to physical objects or only connected to certain natural functions. Yahweh transcended all those limitations. They had seen God’s power demonstrated in their escape from Egypt. With the tabernacle and the priesthood, they were learning about God’s grace, glory, and beauty. They needed to have an expanded imagination and vision of God. Not only was Yahweh bigger and more powerful than what they knew, He was more beautiful and glorious.

When we read the passages in the prophets that contain pictures of God’s restoration of Israel, we see this picture of God’s desire and coming work to make the nation right. Those passages always point to beauty and order. Then, similarly, in Revelation 21 and 22, we see a new Jerusalem and a bride beautifully “adorned for her husband” (21:2). We see the glory of God in this city whose walls are made of the same precious stones that are in Aaron’s clothing. The beauty of what we see here on earth is only a smidgeon of what is to come. But seeing it and understanding it gets us going in the right direction, knowing and believing in this God who loves us and wants to be a part of our lives.

PRAYER

Father, expand our imaginations to take in the reality of who you are. May we understand all your attributes in a fuller way. May they help to define and shape our relationship with you. Help us to make room in our hearts and minds for everything that you want to be for us. Help us to see through those experiences in our own backgrounds that limit our understanding of your work in our lives and in the world. Help us to have a fuller picture of your glory and beauty. May that understanding enable us to glorify you more each day.

DAY 5

EXODUS 29:1, 21, 31-36

¹ “Now this is what you shall do to them to consecrate them, that they may serve me as priests.” . . .

²¹ “Then you shall take part of the blood that is on the altar, and of the anointing oil, and sprinkle it on Aaron and his garments, and on his sons and his sons’ garments with him. He and his garments shall be holy, and his sons and his sons’ garments with him . . .”

³¹ “You shall take the ram of ordination and boil its flesh in a holy place. ³² And Aaron and his sons shall eat the flesh of the ram and the bread that is in the basket in the entrance of the tent of meeting. ³³ They shall eat those things with which atonement was made at their ordination and consecration, but an outsider shall not eat of them, because they are holy. ³⁴ And if any of the flesh for the ordination or of the bread remain until the morning, then you shall burn the remainder with fire. It shall not be eaten, because it is holy.

³⁵ “Thus you shall do to Aaron and to his sons, according to all that I have commanded you. Through seven days shall you ordain them,

³⁶ and every day you shall offer a bull as a sin offering for atonement.”

Aaron and his sons didn’t wake up one day and decide that they were called to be priests. They were appointed by God. Some may have even wondered, “Why them?” They themselves may have wondered that at times. Just as Moses wondered why he had to lead God’s people.

They were men who were just as much in need of God’s mercy as the people they served. They had been called to a special office and because God called them he would also prepare them. They were set apart for this service with great solemnity and ceremony. These measures demonstrated that God’s righteousness was being placed upon them—righteousness that would come at great cost.

PRAYER

Father, just as Aaron and his sons were not worthy to be your priests without the covering of the sacrificial blood, so we are unworthy to be your kingdom of priests without the covering of the blood of Jesus. We plead his blood as we answer your call to present the nations before you in prayer. We praise you that you are holy, and that you make us holy! Amen