



## FOR GLORY AND BEAUTY

Nate Bibens

Exodus is an exciting book—at first. It tells about Israel's dramatic history as slaves in Egypt and their deliverance by God's mighty hand. But after the plagues and the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea, the nation comes to Mt. Sinai, and the nature of Exodus changes. Instead of an exciting narrative, we find meticulous legal details. We start with the Ten Commandments in chapter 20, and from there, God gives detailed instructions concerning various social and religious issues, a detailed pattern for building the tabernacle and its furniture, and even a lengthy section on the garments God wanted made for and worn by the High Priest in chapter 28.

As New Testament Christians, it is easy to get bored in these sections. We may question their relevance and thus be tempted to skim through them, if not skip over them entirely. But within these laws, we can find meaningful lessons. For instance, the priestly garments may seem like a strange and distant topic. In Exodus 28, God provided the pattern for the garments Aaron and subsequent High Priests would be required to wear while serving in the Temple. The garments consisted of a robe, a coat, a turban, a breast piece, and an ephod. The garment was to be skillfully crafted of fine linen, blue, purple, and scarlet yarn, and gold. Certain parts like the shoulder pieces were set with precious jewels and stones, many of which had the names of the tribes of Israel engraved on them. While the outfit may look strange to us now, it must have been an incredible garment for the Israelites who had been freed from slavery!

But why should we be interested in these priestly garments now? We certainly do not wear such garments. In fact, the role and position of the High Priest no longer exists. But as we read Exodus 28, something interesting occurs as God gives Moses the pattern for the priestly raiment. As He tells Moses how to make them, He also explains the reasons for these intricate

garments. As we consider the reasons God gave, we may find surprisingly contemporary truths that apply to our own service and worship as Christians!

### **For Glory & Beauty**

God states the first purpose of the priestly garments in Exodus 28:2 “And you shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother, for glory and for beauty.” When we think of priestly garments, we likely conjure up an image of plain and drab outfits. But that’s not what God designed for the priests of Israel. Moses was instructed to have colorful, golden, jeweled, and finely crafted garments made. These garments were to be glorious and beautiful. These garments remind us that God is a creative being. Not simply in the fact that He creates, but even in the manner that He creates. He could have created something like the sun that provided light and heat, but without the majestic scenes of a sunrise or sunset. He could have created a utilitarian landscape instead of one filled with beauty and wonder. He could have created a simple world instead of a vast universe that mystifies, challenges, and inspires awe. But God has chosen to create beautifully. And God has placed the desire and ability to create beauty within humanity, His crowning creation. And nowhere is beauty richer and fuller than when humanity worships the Creator.

By God’s own plan and design, He desires beauty when His people worship Him. It’s not a simple matter of pleasing aesthetics; beautiful worship reminds us of God’s glorious nature. Psalm 27:4 declares, “One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple.” When Mary of Bethany poured expensive ointment on Jesus’ head and feet, her act of extravagant service was rebuked by Judas and some of the other disciples. But Jesus said, “Leave her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a beautiful thing to me” (Mk. 14:6). God has created beauty for us but has also enabled us to delight Him with the beauty of humble, sacrificial, and obedient worship.

It is important to accept, however, that for worship to be beautiful to God, it must be offered in accordance with His pattern. What if Moses thought green was more beautiful than blue? What if Aaron wanted all diamonds placed in the breast piece instead of an assortment of gems? If left up to men, the aesthetic design of the priestly garments may have looked very different than God’s pattern. But however beautiful those garments may have been, they would not have glorified God, for they would not have followed God’s pattern. Likewise, today, Christians must be careful to follow God’s ways. Whether it’s the doctrines we teach, the ethics we practice, or the manners in which we worship, we must submit to God’s pattern. Our opinions and inventions will never produce glorified beauty like simple obedience will.

### **For Consecration**

While the garments were “for beauty and glory” they were also called “holy garments.” This is expounded on in Exodus 28:3-4: “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. These are the garments

that they shall make: a breast-piece, 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.”

The priestly garments were not just pretty clothes. They served a purpose. One important purpose was consecration. Something that is consecrated is holy, sacred, set apart, or dedicated to God. Approaching God is not a common or casual thing—it is sacred and holy. Further, to worship a holy God, we must be holy people. Worship is not something we do to atone for sinful living—worship calls us to holiness. Worship should shape us so that our daily service is consecrated and holy. As Leviticus states multiple times, “Be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy” (Lev. 11:44-45; 19:2; 20:7; 21:8). As Christians, we are also to be a consecrated people. In the New Testament, this is often expressed in the word “sanctified” or “sanctification.” For example, First Thessalonians 4:3 starts off with a plain enough declaration: “For this is the will of God, your sanctification...”

Countless people are frantically searching for God's will—God's will for who they should marry, what career they should pursue, what town to live in, and on and on. But God's will is much simpler and also much deeper—it is for us to be sanctified; to be set apart and dedicated to Him. Such dedication changes much in our lives. As the Apostle Paul expounds on in First Thessalonians 4, sanctification shapes our morality and behavior. But sanctification changes more than just our morals, it changes everything about us. It calls us to be those who serve God with all of our heart, mind, soul, and strength, both in worship and daily living. For the Christian, we don't wear a particular garment to show our consecration to God—our daily lives should demonstrate that we are set apart for service to the Lord.

### **For Remembrance**

Another function of the High Priestly garments was remembrance. Verse twelve states that the stones on the shoulder pieces and the ephod were set “as stones of remembrance for the sons of Israel.” Later, verse 29 says, “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.”

True worship should remind God's people what He has done. Imagine being Aaron and reading the twelve names engraved on those stones; the twelve names of Jacob's sons. Twelve children may be a big family, but it's just one family. Then imagine going out and seeing the hundreds of thousands of people those twelve had become. Remembering where Israel came from; remembering God's promises and God's actions. Surely that would be a powerful motivator. Throughout the Old Testament, Israel was consistently called to remember the exodus and God's deliverance. In the New Testament, an aspect of our worship is also remembrance. When Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, He commanded, “Do this in remembrance of me” (Lk. 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:24-25). One of the great benefits of worship is it reminds us who God is, what God has done, and what God has promised. Proper remembrance should then motivate faithfulness and endurance.

But in some way, the priestly garments also seemed to serve as a reminder to God. Now, it isn't that God is forgetful and needs reminding. But multiple times in the Old Testament, God's people called on Him to "remember." For example, at the end of his life, the judge Samson cried to God, "O Lord God, please remember me and please strengthen me only this once, O God, that I may be avenged on the Philistines for my two eyes" (Jg. 16:28). When King Hezekiah was sick, he prayed, "Now, O Lord, please remember how I have walked before you in faithfulness and with a whole heart, and have done good in your sight" (2 Kgs. 20:3). And the Psalmist says, "Arise, O God, defend your cause; remember how the foolish scoff at you all the day!" (Ps. 74:22). Why do these (and many other individuals in the Old Testament) call on God to "remember?" It wasn't that God had forgotten, but these prayers and requests were an indication of one's trust in the covenant with God. When we are faithful to the covenant, we can rest assured that God is faithful. He remembers His promises, and He will fulfill them. Thus faithfulness displays a trust in the enduring faithfulness of God.

### **For Judgment and Decisions**

Another function of the priestly garments is alluded to multiple times. At least three times in Exodus 28 the breast piece is called the "breastpiece of judgment." But what sort of judgment? Some translations render this as the "breastpiece of/for decisions" (e.g. CSB, NIV, NET). According to Exodus 28:30, the breast piece was supposed to hold the Urim and Thummim. While much is unknown about these items, it seems they were used for making decisions that were guided by God. Seen in this light, we have an interesting and applicable lesson.

God's will—His patterns and plans—they help us. When we submit to and follow God's ways, then we have a way to make faithful, God-honoring decisions. As mentioned earlier, God's will does not pertain to finding a specific spouse, following a specific career path, or buying a specific house. But serving God does impact our decisions. The faithful child of God will use God's Word as a guide for choosing a spouse, how one works, how money is spent, and many other decisions. So, while the Christian life is not about striving to uncover some secret and elusive "will of God" for all the particulars of life, it is about making God-honoring choices and decisions. As we learn from God, as we grow in God's grace, and as we worship God, we should grow more and more capable of making godly judgments and decisions.

### **For Acceptance**

In Exodus 28:36-38 we read about the pattern for the turban the High Priest would wear. On the turban there was to be a plate of gold with the engraved phrase, "Holy to the LORD." Again, to be holy is to be set apart for and dedicated to God. So, in a paraphrastic sense, this was akin to the priest wearing a sign on his head that said, "I belong to the Lord!" The end of verse 38 says, "It shall regularly be on his forehead, that they may be accepted before the Lord."

Surely, we all want to be accepted by God. If that is our desire, then we must be dedicated to Him. God has never left humanity in the dark about how to be dedicated and thus acceptable to Him. If we would be accepted, we must trust Him and faithfully obey Him. Cain and Abel

provide contrasting pictures of rejection and acceptance. Cain's sacrifice was not accepted by God, which angered Cain. But in Genesis 4:6-7 God asked Cain, "...Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted?" Later, Hebrews 11:4 says, "By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts." God did not just like Abel more than Cain. He had not arbitrarily or unfairly decided to reject Cain and his offering. Abel had sacrificed faithfully, whereas Cain had chosen to not "do well."

When Peter met with Cornelius in Acts 10, he exclaimed, "in every nation anyone who fears [God] and does what is right is acceptable to him." Anyone can be accepted by and acceptable to God. Everyone who is faithful to God will be acceptable to Him. Paul wrote in Romans 12:1, "...present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship." We can be accepted by God, for God has shown us what He will accept. It is merely up to us to faithfully dedicate ourselves to Him and obey His Word.

### **"So That He Does Not Die"**

The final reason for the high priest's garments may seem startling but is very important. God instructed Moses to line the hem of the robe with an alternating pattern of yarn pomegranates and golden bells. That may sound like a very obscure detail, but I'm sure it was one Aaron appreciated very much. Exodus 28:35 says, "...it shall be on Aaron when he ministers, and its sound shall be heard when he goes into the Holy Place before the Lord, and when he comes out, *so that he does not die.*" It was not that God could be surprised and accidentally break out and kill the high priest. This requirement reminded the priest of just how awesome his activities were.

To enter the presence of God is no trifling ordeal. Were God not to hold himself back, His glory and presence would kill a mortal! That must have been a frightening thought to Aaron. So once again, we see worshipping and approaching God is no light, casual thing. In fact, worshipping God is not a safe thing. Many Christians have likely never considered worship to be dangerous. Most probably think worship would only be dangerous in a place where violent persecution exists. But even in peaceful environs, worship can be dangerous. If a person approaches God flippantly and carelessly, that is dangerous, for it is possible to do more harm than good through worship, if worship is not reverential and faithful. In 1 Corinthians 11:17, Paul lamented of the Corinthian worship, "...when you come together, it is not for the better but for the worse." Christians should live each day in a reverent, worshipful manner towards God. And on occasions of assembled worship, Christians should approach that joyously, yet also reverently.

But this seemingly strange requirement demonstrates something else—God is a life-giving God. Not only has the Lord created life, but He has also worked to protect and save life. He warned Adam and Eve against the tree that would bring death. He instructed Noah concerning an Ark to save himself, his family, and ultimately the world. And for Aaron and subsequent High Priests, God provided a pattern that protected their lives.

Many people balk at God's commands, but what they are rejecting is life. The Lord created life, and wants to give life, even to sinners. As John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." Jesus said in John 10:10, "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly." God is a holy God; He is an avenging God; He is a wrathful God toward the impenitent sinner. But He is a merciful, forgiving, and saving God. His instructions are not burdensome, and His laws are not arbitrary. God's Word is for our benefit so that we might know Him, seek Him, obey Him, and find life in Him.

### **A Royal Priesthood**

Gone are the days of Levites, priests, and high priests. Gone are the days of the Tabernacle and of Temple worship, animal sacrifice, and priestly garments. But now, all God's children are a part of the royal priesthood, a kingdom of priests. In 1 Peter 2:9 we read, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." In Revelation 1:5 and 6 we read that Jesus has "...made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father..."

As royal priests of the New Covenant, we will never wear garments like those described in Exodus 28. But do our lives resemble those garments? Can our faith, service, and worship be described in such terms? Do we delight in the beauty of faithful, obedient worship? Does our faithful worship glorify God? Are we consecrated to God, set apart from worldliness and dedicated to Him? Do we remember the Lord's work and His will? Do we abide by the instructions of the New Covenant, fulfilling God's work for us and trusting in His promises? What about our decisions, both big and small? Do worship and daily faithfulness guide us toward godly and righteous decisions? Are our lives, worship, and hearts acceptable to God because they align with His Word? And are we standing in the confident hope of eternal life?

The days of priestly garments may be passed, but the days of glory and beauty are not. And just imagine—if the physical garments of an old law could have been for glory and beauty, what must the faithfulness of those who have put on Christ and become royal priests accomplish?

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