

Aaron & Christ

Two priest's offices

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(PARTLY BASED ON A MEETING HELD IN DEN HELDER ON 26/72026)

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Bible reading

The high priest's garments

IN HIS DAILY OFFICE

“All that are wise hearted, whom I have filled with the spirit of wisdom ... may make Aaron's garments to consecrate him, that he may minister unto me in the priest's office. 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 they shall make **the ephod** of gold, of blue, and of purple, of scarlet, and fine twined linen, with cunning work. It shall have the **two shoulderpieces** thereof joined at the two edges thereof; and so it shall be joined together. 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. And thou shalt take **two onyx stones**, and grave on them **the names of the children of Israel**: Six of their names on one stone, and the other six names of the rest on the other stone, according to their birth. 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**. 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. And thou shalt make ouches of gold; And two chains of pure gold at the ends; of wreathen work shalt thou make them, and fasten the wreathen chains to the ouches.

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. Foursquare it shall be being doubled; a span shall be the length thereof, and a span shall be the breadth thereof. 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. And the second row shall be an emerald, a sapphire, and a diamond. And the third row a ligure, an agate, and an amethyst. And the fourth row a beryl, and an onyx, and a jasper: they shall be set in gold in their inclosings. 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 ... And **Aaron shall bear the names of the children of Israel in the breastplate of judgment upon his heart**, when he goeth in unto the holy place, for a memorial before the Lord **continually**" (Exodus 28 v.3-29).

HIS UNDERWEAR

"Thou shalt embroider the coat of fine linen, and thou shalt make the mitre of fine linen, and thou shalt make the girdle of needlework.

Thou shalt make coats, ... girdles, and bonnets for glory and for beauty. And thou shalt put them upon Aaron thy brother, and his sons with him; and shalt anoint them, and consecrate them, and sanctify them, that they may minister unto me in the priest's office. And thou shalt make them **linen breeches to cover their nakedness**; from the loins even unto the thighs they shall reach:

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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 minis-

ter 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” (Exodus 28 v.39-43).

GARMENTS WORN ON THE GREAT DAY OF ATONEMENT

“He shall put on the holy linen coat, and he shall have the linen breeches upon his flesh, and shall be girded with a linen girdle, and with the linen mitre shall he be attired: these are holy garments” (Leviticus 16 v.4)

Comments

When the Epistle to the Hebrews speaks of the High Priest, it immediately brings to mind the person of the Lord Jesus, who prays ceaselessly for His own, never growing weary and never faltering. In this way, He fulfils the office of the perfect High Priest in heaven.

He thinks of us ceaselessly, and constantly carries us on His shoulders and against His breast. The subject of the Lord Jesus as High Priest is a vast one and deeply enriching for the soul. We have just read the description of His garments in the passages from Exodus 28. Let us examine them in order.

Linen breeches

These were large linen undergarments: the hips, the upper thighs – everything had to be covered so that no flesh was visible. These undergarments were made of linen as white as cotton.

White symbolises purity: the perfect purity of our High Priest. The sinless Man.

The robe of the ephod all of blue

Over his underpants he wore a sky-blue robe, which was the outer garment visible. This speaks to us of the Man who came from heaven, always in a heavenly frame of mind.

The Ephod

N.B. The ephod is that sort of colourful apron shown in the picture

Over the robe of the ephod, he was in fact wearing the centrepiece of his outfit: this ephod of gold, of blue, and of purple, of scarlet, and fine twined linen, with cunning work – a true work of art. This garment covered the upper part of the body.

THE STONES BORNE ON HIS SHOULDERS

The most important feature of this garment worn by the high priest was what was found on the shoulder pieces (the ‘shoulder straps’): two onyx stones on which were engraved the names of the twelve tribes of Israel

In this way, he bore the whole of God’s people on his shoulders.

Our High Priest, the Lord Jesus, carries on his shoulders the whole of God’s people, who today is the Assembly (or Church), the sum total of all those who have been born again.

The breastplate of judgement

N.B. This is the square, coloured piece placed on the ephod at chest level

This breastplate bore 12 stones, each inscribed with the name of a tribe.

We can see from this that the high priest carried every member of God's people, individually, on his chest.

Just as the Lord Jesus bears the whole of God's present people upon His shoulders, so too does He bear each one of us, members of His Body (the Assembly or Church), individually, upon His breast, the seat of His heart.

The Lord Jesus is now praying for His own; we can be certain of this if we belong to Him, and we can therefore say: for me, in a very personal way.

The garments worn on the Day of Atonement

But what is surprising is that these garments, described here in such detail, were worn by the high priest throughout the year. Day after day, with just one exception: the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16).

This was a special occasion, taking place only once a year: on this Day of Atonement, when the sacrifices were offered, the high priest had to collect the blood of a bull and that of a goat, to carry it into the sanctuary — indeed, into the Holy of Holies — in order to apply it once to the mercy seat (*), which covered the Ark. The blood of the bull was sprinkled seven

times upon the Ark and the mercy seat, and the blood of the goat was sprinkled seven times as well.

- (*) The mercy seat, made of pure gold, was placed like a cover upon the ark, and above it were two our golden cherubim facing the mercy seat where the blood was placed on the Day of Atonement (Exodus 25:17–21).

On that day, the high priest wore simple garments of white linen.

Two aspects of the Lord Jesus' priest's office

These two garments of the High Priest speak to us of two different aspects of the priest's office. We find them in the Epistle to the Hebrews.

In this epistle, we find an explanation of all the laws and prescriptions that God gave to the people through Moses, thereby illustrating the functions fulfilled by the Lord Jesus on our behalf.

THE SIDE OF THE PRIESTHOOD ON THE DAY OF ATONEMENT

“Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people” (Hebrews 2 v.17).

In this verse, we learn of His role as High Priest on the Day of Atonement. It is the only day on which He did not wear His heavenly garments (the sky-blue robe).

This verse also teaches us why He had to become like His brothers in every respect, becoming a man like us, in order to carry out the atoning work for the sins of God's people.

This is what the Great Day of Atonement is all about.

This Great Day speaks to us of **the cross!**

The Lord Jesus fulfilled His mission as High Priest once and for all whilst He was on earth. This took place at Golgotha. It was there that the Great Day of Atonement was realised. It was there, on the cross, that He accomplished the work that atones for the sins of God's people.

For Aaron and those who followed him in the office of High Priest, this took place on a single day of the year; on the other days they carried out their usual duties in the garments described above.

Chapter 7 of the Epistle to the Hebrews discusses a priest's office, known as that of Melchisedec, which is compared to that of Aaron; it is stated that he *"belongs to a different tribe, of which no one has ever been attached to the service of the altar"* (v.13 JND). Under the Old Covenant, only a son of Levi, a descendant of Aaron, could perform service at the altar. It is also stated that *"our Lord has sprung out of Juda, as to which tribe Moses spake nothing as to priests."* (v.14 JND).

According to the Law, the Lord Jesus could in no way be High Priest on earth, as He was not of the tribe of Levi, and therefore not of the lineage of Aaron either.

Why, then, at Golgotha, was He so on that one occasion?

There, He was lifted up above the earth. He hung between heaven and earth! Suspended on the cross, He was lifted up above the earth (*).

(*) *“As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, thus must the Son of man be lifted up, that every one who believes on him may not perish, but have life eternal”* (John 3:14–15 JND).

The laws of Moses were in force only on earth; yet, although He was of the tribe of Judah, He was able to be High Priest in the atoning work of the cross, fulfilling what the Day of Atonement in Aaron’s priesthood was merely a foreshadowing of.

This work, this aspect of the Lord Jesus’ priest’s office, is finished, once and for all. He has accomplished the work of atonement for sins. He cried out, *“It is finished”* (John 19:30), and it was indeed finished. That is why the Lord Jesus, as High Priest, no longer has anything to do with our sins. If we happen to sin by accident, it is not His priest’s office that we need, but His role as our Advocate before the Father.

THE ROLE OF ADVOCATE IS NOT THAT OF THE HIGH PRIEST.

“My children, these things I write to you in order that ye may not sin; and if any one sin, we have a patron (*) with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 John 2 v.1 JND)

(*) or an advocate, or intercessor, the one who comes to the rescue!

If, despite everything, we still sin, what happens then? The 1st verse of 1 John 2 explains this to us. It does not say, “if any one sin, we have a High Priest with God”, but: “We have an Advocate with the Father”. The Lord Jesus’ priest’s office, in the likeness of the Great Day of Atonement, is linked to the holy God, and not to our Father (*).

(*) At the height of His agony, the Lord did not say “My Father, why have You forsaken Me?” but “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”

See also, on this subject, the comment made in the section “THE SIDE OF CHRIST’S PRIEST’S OFFICE IN THE HEAVEN” (page 16).

And it was at Golgotha that He carried out the judgement of the holy God upon all our sins. That judgement has been carried out. The atonement has been accomplished. It is a done deal for all time. God’s demands have been met. We are justified. Nothing can be added to it.

It is quite another matter when, now that we are believers — people born again, justified for ever — we stumble, when we unfortunately sin despite everything. We do not then need the cross of Golgotha all over again. No, that is definitively accomplished.

The work accomplished at Golgotha is complete, once and for all. It is never necessary to repeat it. On the other hand, when we sin, when we stumble, our relationship with our Father is severed.

We are his children and we remain his children. But when a child disobeys, there is a rift in the relationship. There is a barrier between the father and

the child. Of course, he remains the father and the child remains his child, but the relationship is disrupted and this must be resolved. That is why, when we have sinned, we must confess our sins before God:

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

N.B. It is not towards us that He is faithful and just, but towards the Lord Jesus, who bore all our sins on the cross and took them away entirely, and the righteous and holy God was fully satisfied with this. Everything depends on Christ, nothing on us! This gives us complete assurance.

Strictly speaking, we do not even need to ask for forgiveness, for our sins are forgiven. But we must acknowledge them before the Father, confess them, and then He cleanses us from them in a tangible way. And thus, the relationship is restored.

This concerns a child’s relationship with God the Father, his Father. In this case, we do not need the High Priest, but the intercession before the Father by Jesus Christ the Righteous One. It is not because of the occasional sins we commit — and into which we unfortunately fall — that we need our High Priest! This took place at Golgotha, when none of our sins had yet been committed!

THE SIDE OF CHRIST’S PRIEST’S OFFICE IN THE HEAVEN

“Having therefore a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast the confession. For we have not a high priest not able to sympathise with our infirmities, but tempted in all things in

like manner, sin apart. Let us approach therefore with boldness to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy, and find grace for seasonable help” (Hebrews 4 v.14-16 JND).

Having fulfilled His mission as High Priest on earth, once and for all, at Golgotha, with His own blood, the work is complete; He has ascended to Heaven, where He now resides and where He ceaselessly carries out His daily role as High Priest.

This is not because of sins committed accidentally, but because of the infirmities inherent in the nature of the world in which we live. This is what Hebrews 4 teaches us.

This is what Peter experienced when the Lord Jesus, whilst He was still on earth, said to him: “*Simon, Simon ... I have prayed for thee*”

We read further on in the Epistle to the Hebrews that the Lord Jesus lives for ever to intercede on our behalf. (*).

(*) “*Seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them*” (Hebrews 7:25).

We are still on earth, and we are weak, and we face the infirmities associated with the earth, with the world in which we live.

In the passage from Hebrews 4 quoted above, the focus is not on our personal weaknesses linked to our old nature (*), for the Lord was never tempted by the weakness of the flesh, as He did not possess that nature.

- (*) It is certainly true that we all have such weaknesses. For one person, it is greed; for another, it is more a matter of jealousy; yet another is more prone to pride; and so, everyone has their own weaknesses.

The Lord Jesus was tempted in all these earthly infirmities, just as we are, but Scripture makes it clear: “*sin apart*”. These infirmities, therefore, have nothing to do with sin, with iniquity, or with our old nature.

The infirmities referred to here are the circumstances in which we find ourselves. The situations we experience on earth very often place us in a position of infirmities or vulnerability, and it is in this that we are put to the test, just as the Lord Jesus also experienced.

One example among many: hunger.

In reality, we who live in privileged regions are not really in a position to speak about it, but how many millions of people on earth suffer from hunger? The Lord Jesus, too, experienced hunger. He had not eaten for forty days and forty nights, and Scripture tells us that, in the end, He was hungry.

The Lord Jesus was not weak; no, it was the circumstances (the desert, where there were nothing but stones) that led him to experience this infirmity, which is hunger. So what happens when we experience this weakness of hunger? We are then tempted, if the opportunity arises, to steal a small loaf of bread from somewhere, because we are hungry. This

circumstance (hunger) is not a sin; no, this circumstance is a infirmity linked to the earth, but because of it, we can fall into sin.

But the Lord Jesus, when He was hungry and Satan was able to tempt Him by saying, “*command that these stones be made bread*”, the Lord Jesus’ reply was: “My Father has not sent me to turn these stones into bread to satisfy my hunger, so I will not do it”. He remained obedient.

In this circumstance linked to his infirmity, when he was tempted, he stood firm; but it is thanks to this that he is able – and this is the apostle’s point – to have experienced what it is like to face such a situation, linked in particular to this infirmity. That is why he understands the plight of those millions of people who are suffering from hunger.

The Lord Jesus knew what it was like to be weary: going several nights in a row without sleep is exhausting. In many circumstances, one can be at the end of one’s tether. The Lord Jesus, too, knew what it was like to be weary. He fell asleep in the boat on a pillow whilst a violent storm was raging (Mark 4:35–41). Weariness is a weakness and certainly not a sin!

Fatigue is a state we find ourselves in, and it is a weakness, because in such circumstances we are more likely to stumble than usual. We all know this. When we are well-rested and something happens, we can react calmly.

When we are exhausted and the same thing happens, we may lose our temper. That is what we are, as human beings. That is why this situation is a weakness, and also poses a danger of stumbling. But the Lord

experienced it without stumbling. This is what the apostle means when he writes that we have a High Priest who *“but was in all points tempted like as we are”*

In all these things, he was tempted just as we are. We may be grieving: the loss of a loved one, a father, a husband, a wife, a mother or a child. Grief can affect you so deeply that you react very differently from how you would under normal circumstances. The Lord Jesus also experienced these same circumstances.

It is not stated literally, but we can assume that Joseph died young. And Joseph was not the father of the Lord Jesus. But as far as earthly family life was concerned, he was the head of the household, a father in his own right. The Lord Jesus stood by Joseph’s tomb. He also stood by Lazarus’s tomb and wept. He saw the effect this had on people. He was filled with compassion. He was tempted in every way, just as we are. That is why He understands us. And that is also why He is the ideal High Priest before God. He knows what it is like to be in need — whether financial or otherwise — to be weary, to be disappointed, to be alone (the Lord knows better than anyone what loneliness is), and not to be understood when we are wrongly accused.

Whatever circumstances we find ourselves in, the Lord Jesus knows them. He knows them from experience. That is why He knows exactly what we need in those circumstances.

In His heavenly High Priest's office , He intercedes with God and makes this request: "My God, I have experienced these circumstances myself; I know how very difficult they are. I know what he needs right now. Please grant it to him! Please provide for his needs."

N.B. It is important to understand this:

Just as Aaron, the High Priest, addressed the Holy and Righteous God when he appeared before Him in his usual office garments, as described above, so too does the Lord Jesus, in His High Priest's Office, intercedes for us before the Holy and Righteous God, and not before the Father: God sees what we are **in Christ**, through what is symbolised by "the stones upon his shoulders" and "the stones upon his heart", namely the Assembly, God's people on earth, and each of its members, viewed individually as they face the infirmity of this earth. **Within the context of this office**, the relationship is not with the Father but with God in all His Holiness; all the characteristics of the garments are symbols of this.

As far are concerned, we turn to the Father when we are in need; the Lord tells us: "*Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things*".

Such is the Lord Jesus, our High Priest. He is always thinking of us; He possesses perfect experience! He speaks of things He knows. And with a heart full of love. He is always thinking of us, never of Himself.

We have the very best of High Priests, for He truly carries us on His shoulders — not symbolically with onyx stones — and He holds us close to His chest, not symbolically with a breastplate either.

As we know, shoulders symbolise strength in Scripture; they are synonymous with strength. If one has to carry a heavy beam or a sack of flour, it is best done on the shoulder.

But the Lord Jesus carries on His chest what is symbolised by “the twelve precious stones of the breastplate”. In the chest where the heart lies, He thus carries us close to His heart, which bears witness to His love.

The strength of His shoulder and the love of the heart within the bosom of the Lord Jesus: strength and love. This is how He carries us before the face of God in heaven. And He does so without ceasing. Even whilst we sleep. He never slumbers. He works ceaselessly on our behalf.

And then we see that these precious stones are set in their gold mountings, like the two stones on His shoulders. These images found in the Word are marvellous and eloquent: a precious stone bears witness to God’s glory, for when light shines upon them, that light is refracted and they sparkle with a thousand lights. This is the manifold glory of God. It speaks of us, as God sees us through Christ. Our name is engraved on these precious stones. In this way, we can reflect God’s glory. And each stone is itself set in a gold setting.

The precious stones of divine glory, and the gold of divine justice.

Are we that? When we see these images, we ask ourselves: “Are we really that?” Divine glory, set within divine justice. Yes, that is how God sees us!

Not only have we received God's righteousness, but it is clearly stated that we have become the righteousness of God (*).

(*) *“He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2 Corinthians 5:21).*

In some church-systems, it is quite common to think of ourselves as sinners in need of mercy. This is absolutely incorrect. We used to be lost sinners. We are no longer that; we are now the righteous! We have become the righteousness of God!

This does not, of course, refer to the practical righteousness of our everyday lives; it concerns the standing we have in Jesus Christ. This is how God sees us: He sees us in Christ. He sees us as justified people, having become the righteousness of God. In God's eyes, there is no longer any trace of sin, thanks to the cross. It has all been taken away!

Such is our position in Christ.

And this is how our heavenly High Priest presents us before the face of God. It is to God that the High Priest addresses himself; it is not a question of our relationship with the Father! He says, as it were: ‘O God’. For the office of High Priest does not concern our relationship with the Father — a familial relationship within the family of God. (*)

(*) See the comment on this subject above (page 16).

This concerns our relationship as members of the people of God. The High Priest, standing before God, says to Him: “O God, look upon this man: do

you see this precious stone? His name is engraved upon it. He is a reflection of your glory. He is your righteousness. Will you watch over him? Will you give him what he needs on his journey through this world?"

We think far too little about the fact that at every moment of the day, at every moment of our entire lives, we can be assured that the Lord Jesus, in His office as High Priest, is before God, interceding for us in circumstances marked by the infirmities we experience.

Yes, I often go through periods without thinking of Him, yet He is always thinking of me. He looks after my interests.

Isn't it marvellous to have such a High Priest who prays ceaselessly for us!

