

## Exodus 28:4, 15-29

## 'Gems from the Garments of Glory' (2)

We're turning back again this evening to Exodus 28 in our series on the garments of the high priest - it's a series I have called: **Gems from the Garments of Glory**. After our study last week, I hope your appetite has been whetted for more of the same! The PowerPoint slide gives you an artist's impression of the various garments ... Last week you'll recall we did an introduction to the series ... when we asked and answered six important questions on the subject. And the bottom line is that Aaron as high priest speaks to us so eloquently of the Lord Jesus Christ, as our Great High Priest ... and the sons of Aaron typify you and I as believer-priests, for that's what we are, according to Peter, 'a holy priesthood' and 'a royal priesthood.'

In one sense, each of these garments is inviting us to 'turn our eyes upon Jesus, to look full in his wonderful face ...' This evening we shine the spotlight on the first one mentioned in verse 4 and that is **the breastplate of twelve precious stones** - you can see it illustrated on the slide ... what lessons can we learn from it?

### **The wisdom behind it**

No matter what angle we view it from, this is something mere man could never have planned, this is not of human origin - rather, it has the divine thumbprint stamped all over it. This is God reminding us that 'his ways are past finding out' - he is the master architect.

In this study, we'll not be focusing on the colours or the material of the breastplate ... it was made of 'gold, and blue, purple, and scarlet yarn, and of finely twisted linen' (verse 15) ... more about that in study 3, next Wednesday evening, when we examine the multi-coloured ephod.

And a few weeks down the line, in our last study of this present series of 5, we will talk about the Urim and Thummim ... that's when we will take time out to ponder the significance of its name as in verse 15, 'the breastplate of judgment' or 'the breastplate for making decisions' as it is in the NIV. That probably gives the game away, but it's worth waiting for.

Both James and Paul refer to a 'wisdom which comes from above' ... we see evidence of that right here for such divine wisdom is manifested in at least two directions:

### **The wisdom behind their identity**

You will realise that there were two lists of names associated with the high priest - there were those on the two onyx stones, one on either shoulder ... and there were those which graced the breastplate. Why two and what's the difference between them?

Very simple, really ... the names graven on the onyx stones were listed **according to birth** as in Genesis 49 ... so it began with Reuben, then on to Simeon, Levi, Judah, Dan, and Naphtali, all on the right shoulder - on the left shoulder were

the names of Gad, Asher, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph and, finally, Benjamin.

The twelve sons of Jacob were all there! It didn't matter who was first or who was last - all are there, all are the same, no difference at all. And so it is with you and me - we were all born in sin, but we thank God, we can be born again by the Spirit of God. By birth, we're all tarred with the same brush ...! But that needn't be the end of the story ...

However, the names penned on the breastplate were different ... they were there **according to the tribes** as in Numbers 10. Check it out and you'll find that when they struck camp and marched through the desert that they did it in a certain order. Nothing haphazard about it. Judah was upfront, he was first, followed by Issachar, and Zebulun, all down to the last three tribes, as far as Dan, Asher, and Naphtali.

That's a picture of our walk with God in grace - no matter who we are, all of us are at different stages in our relationship with God.

I think the message is fairly clear: one says, that is what I am by nature - the other says, this is what I am by grace!

#### The wisdom behind their inscription

These were precious gems - we're not sure of their exact value, but they were costly. Echoes of the truth that we are 'graven on the palm of his hand.' Each of the tribes could say, 'I am precious to him no matter where my stone is. All that matters is that I'm there!'

For example, in Genesis 49:3 we read that Reuben is as 'turbulent as the waters' - marked by instability like the waters - yet precious. With all his weakness he was dear to the heart of the high priest. And, my friend, the same holds true for you and me ...

When we unpick this a wee bit more, we see the wonderful suitability of the stone designated for each of the twelve tribes. It's worth pointing out that different translations have different names for some of the stones! Let me show you what I mean by picking out four of the tribes ...

Reuben - according to Numbers 10:18 he was the 4th tribe. His stone was a turquoise - sea green in colour, speaking of water - I mentioned the connection we have in Genesis 49:3-4.

Reuben had a great weakness - he was up and down, marked by instability - to and fro - from pillar to post ... there's also a great curse for we read 'he shall not excel.' That's because of the weakness he had, his propensity to ebb and flow like any water.

What did God do? Well, he put him on the stone near to his heart and on his shoulders - why? He knew that Reuben would need him ... so do we!

Look at Zebulun, the third tribe in Numbers 10. His stone was the beryl - a stone associated with glittering brilliance - a flashing stone, linked with energy. When we compare Genesis 49:13 with Deuteronomy 33:18, they were a tribe by the sea which went out in ships - they were an outgoing people, always active.

What did God do? Well, he put him on the breastplate because he knew that Zebulun would need him every bit as much as Reuben. Again, it is true in your life and mine as well ...

Here's one more - think about Gad, who was the 6th tribe according to Numbers 10:20. His stone is the diamond - it cannot be marked, it's strong, it's used to cut glass, etc. It's noted for being hard and firm. See what it says over in Genesis 49:19 - says that he would be 'attacked by a band of raiders, but he will attack them at their heels.'

See that - at first he is overtaken, he's overrun, he's overcome, then, he is victorious at the end. Does that not ring a bell? How many of us are just like Gad - we can identify with him.

And what did God do? As before, he placed him on the breastplate - the secret of his winning in the end, of overcoming, was in the ability of the high priest to represent him ... just like every one of us with Jesus, our Great High Priest. There's victory in Jesus!

The last one we'll consider is the first one on the list - Judah ... he's the sardius stone, ruby red.

The question is, why is he there? Well, one look at Genesis 49:8-12 and you can see why - see her supremacy, her royal line, renowned for plenty of good things, an abundance of riches ... BUT Judah as the leading tribe needed the high priest just as much, if not more, as any of the other 11!

And the take-home lesson for you and me is this: no matter who we are or where we are, we are all precious to him ... come what may, we can look to him, rely upon him, because we need him day by day.

### **The wonder of it**

One look at the breastplate and you can't fail to be impressed - 12 precious stones, no two alike, all very different in colour and texture - yet, when together, they make up 1 breastpiece. A bit like the golden lampstand in the holy place ... 7 branches, yet one candlestick. Does that not echo the words of Paul when he often said we are many members of one body? The glorious truth is, we're not all the same yet, in Christ, we are all one! With that thought in mind, there is:

### **The wonder of their fellowship**

All twelve are there together - joined - a sense of unity, absolute harmony - they are bonded. It can't be any other way ... each stone is in its proper place, it is where it's meant to be. Read Psalm 133:2, where the unity we share is 'like precious oil poured on the head, running down on Aaron's beard, down upon the collar of his robes.' Echoes there of John 17 and the high priestly prayer of Jesus in the upper room ... his aspiration was that 'they all may be one.'

### **The wonder of their foundation**

We read in verse 20 that the twelve stones are individually mounted 'in gold settings.' Silver in the Bible is a type of redemption, but gold points

us in the direction of deity. There are three lovely thoughts here:

Each one was set in a setting of gold - that is, 'I am divinely held!' The grip of God is on us. AND ... 'I am personally held' for each stone had its own setting - it was enclosed with gold around it - reminds us of his everlasting arms wrapped around his people ... AND it could also affirm, 'I am firmly held' - we are eternally secure for not one stone would be removed. It was there for good as they couldn't fall off or fall out!

#### The wonder of their formation

The big question is, What is a jewel? According to F B Meyer, 'A jewel is a piece of ordinary clay that has passed through an extraordinary experience.' So relevant, isn't it ... think about your own life - we are clay in the hands of the Potter ... he shapes us, he fashions us, he moulds us - and he does that through trials and troubles over a period of time. But he knows what he's doing and he can visualise the finished article. Malachi reminds us of these words, 'they shall be mine, in that day when I make up my jewels' (3:17).

#### The wealth of it

I have to be honest and say that this aspect of our study really fascinates me ... it is, first, seen in their representation - there are no duplicates here. It's a breastplate marked by a rich variety - no two stones are the same, so very different. Just like us in the family of God - we're as different as chalk and cheese, different

personalities, different gifts, different ideas, yet not one stone could be done without!

Applies to us in our ministries - some are fiery like the sardius, others are quiet like the soft sapphire ... yes, God has given gifts to his church, to every believer ... must be ourselves for God! Did you notice they were set in gold, then set in order ... an important principle to take on board in the life of every gospel church.

Seen in their resplendence ... for each stone had a light of its own which God had given to them. We may not always be aware of it but our lives are shining lights in today's dark world.

Seen in their responsibility ... when the high priest went into the holy place the gems on his breastplate would shine because of the light from the candlestick/lampstand ... every stone reflected the beauty of the light ... so it is with you and I - we shine for Jesus and, in so doing, we reflect the light that comes first from him.

#### The worth of it

This ought to thrill each of our hearts and send us home with a spring in our step ... the worth of each of those stones is seen best in their unique position. If these stones could speak, they would say no fewer than 5 heartwarming truths:

One, they are near to his heart ... think about it, they could've been anywhere but they're on his heart!

Two, they are dear to his heart ... the high priest really cared for them and about them. Reminds me of the old hymn, *Safe in the arms of Jesus*,

*Safe on his gentle breast, There by his love o'er shaded, Sweetly my soul shall rest.*

Three, they are bound to his heart ... we see that in verses 22-28. They are held in place by chains of gold - speaking of strength, power, and ability. They are also attached with blue ribbons - hints of tenderness of love and concern from a love that will not let us go! We also read of rings of gold which highlights the thought of everlasting love.

Four, they are supported upon his heart ... the material was doubled to form a kind of pouch, in which the Urim and Thummim were placed. It was foursquare. With the weight of the twelve stones upon it, it needed to be extra strong for them to be kept in that position ... it prevented them from falling away from his heart.

Five, they occupied all of his heart ... a span is around 9 inches so the breastplate took up all of his heart. All twelve were there ... in other words, his whole heart was behind them. Ah, where would we be, what would we be, without the love of God?

In closing, I recall the words of the hymn penned by Philip Bliss: *I am so glad that our Father in heaven, Tells of his love in the book he has given, Wonderful things in the Bible I see, This is the dearest that Jesus loves me.*

Next week, God willing, the torchlight will shine on the multicoloured ephod.