

Exodus 28:30

'Gems from the Garments of Glory' (5)

We're turning back again this evening to Exodus 28 in our series on the garments of the high priest - I have called the series: **Gems from the Garments of Glory**. We're at number 5 ... and, the good news is, we'll be back next October to do the other five ...

After our introductory study, we spent some time looking at the breastplate, followed by the multicoloured ephod, then last Wednesday we talked about the two shoulder onyx stones - all of these remind us of the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ as our Great High Priest. He's the one who represents us before our Father day by day - he, unfailingly, pleads our case at the throne of grace.

As Charitie Bancroft penned: *Before the throne of God above, I have a strong, a perfect plea; A great high priest whose name is love, Who ever lives to plead for me.*

And tonight's study is focusing on two more stones - you can see them on the PP slide - they are the Urim and the Thummim. Not much is said about them in Exodus 28 - only a few lines in one verse, but we read of them often in the pages of the Old Testament. They are a powerful reminder to each one of us that our God is able to lead us and guide us.

On that note of reassurance, I often think of the words of the hymn, for this is what the urim and the thummim are all about: *He leadeth me, O*

blessed thought, O words with heavenly comfort fraught. Whate'er I do, where'er I be, Still 'tis God's hand that leadeth me. There are five main points in our study this evening:

The mystery surrounding the stones

I think it's true to say that there's always been a fair bit of speculation centred around these two stones - some of it is quite fanciful and a bit over the top. Down the years, many sincere folks have wondered and pondered over their significance, and that's perfectly understandable. Sometimes, the less we know about something, the more our imagination runs riot! So it's best for us to stick to what we do know ...

They are identical stones - they are the same in shape, same in size, same in weight - if you had them in your coat pocket and you were fiddling around with them, by touching and feeling them you couldn't tell any difference ... because they are exactly the same.

They are the same, only different - and the thing that is different is their colour - one is white and one is black ... the white one is the Urim - the Hebrew word on the stone means 'light' ... the black one is the Thummim - and the Hebrew word on the stone means 'truth' ...

For you and I, it may seem a tad strange, but for the Jewish people back there and then, it wasn't an issue at all ... when we look back at some of their ancient customs, you'll see what I mean.

One, in a court of law when the verdict was pronounced and a sentence was handed down by the presiding judge or magistrate - a guilty person would be handed the black stone and that signified condemnation ... if a person was acquitted they would be given the white stone.

Two, in elections to various appointments in local government ... it was used to select those who run for public office - a number of black stones are put in a bag along with one white stone. The person duly elected is the one who picks out the white stone!

Three, similarly in the farming community - men would draw a stone from a bag for the allocation of land - that meant there was no unfairness, or bias, or favouritism, in land distribution. It was you who picked the stone so you can't complain afterwards!

Four, a white stone was granted to the athlete who came first in various field and track events. That entitled that person to his reward and it was also a ticket to the winner's banquet when the event was over.

Now, when we turn to Revelation 2:17 and the message to the church in Pergamum, we read: 'To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna. **I will also give him a white stone** with a new name written on it.'

There we have it - 'I will give him a white stone' - that goes back to the idea of the Urim ... we can tag on to it all that I've pointed out in relation to it - it's the white stone of acquittal for we are

justified ... because of God's outrageous grace, we are elected and chosen by him to be kings and priests unto our God ... we are allocated an inheritance with the saints ... our reward at the end of the race is a crown of life, along with an admission ticket to the marriage supper of the Lamb! We are well blessed, aren't we?

As we often say - 'God moves in a mysterious way, his wonders to perform' - for me, I'm not so worried about the air of mystery, there's nothing uncertain or unsure about it, none, all that really matters is that God moves. And we know deep down from our own experience that, in his time, 'God is his own interpreter, and he will make it plain.' Maybe not down here, but over there.

The meaning suggested from the stones

We can be fairly certain of the meaning of the two words - Urim speaks of light or lights and Thummim refers to truth and/or perfection. If we go back to the Bible, we can find both of these illustrated in many ways. For example:

When we speak of the Urim, it's helpful to note that James presents him as 'the father of lights' - one 'who does not change like shifting shadows.' John shows him in his first epistle as the one who 'is light and in whom there is no darkness at all.' In John's gospel, Jesus introduced himself as 'the light of the world.' That leads me to say that he is the source of all light - that fact is seen in 4 spheres:

Natural light - Genesis 1:3 - the sun, moon, and stars are all his handiwork. He said, 'let there be

light, and there was light.' **Intellectual** light - we know from Daniel 2:22 that 'he reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what lies in darkness, and light dwells with him.' And, true to form, he revealed the secret of Nebuchadnezzar's dream to his servant Daniel.

Theological light - in Psalm 119:105 we are told that 'your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.' Elsewhere, it is the entrance of his word that gives light - and we see that illustrated in Acts 8 in the story of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch ...

then there is **spiritual** light - Peter tells us in 1 Peter 2:9 that we have been brought out of darkness 'into his marvellous light' ... such is the wonder of our conversion to Jesus Christ - knowing him is like living in a different world! A world of light where the darkness is dispelled.

As Thomas Binney penned: *Eternal light, eternal light, How pure the soul must be, When, placed within thy searching sight, It shrinks not, but with calm delight, Can live and look on thee.*

Or one written by Walter Chalmers Smith: *Great Father of glory, pure Father of light, Thine angels adore thee, all veiling their sight; All laud we would render; O help us to see, 'Tis only the splendour of light hideth thee.*

When we think of the Thummim and it speaking of truth or perfection, we can do something similar - Jesus said himself that he is 'the way, the truth, and the life.' We know from John and the high priestly prayer that his 'Word is truth.'

The Spirit of God is described as the 'Spirit of truth.' And from the early chapters in the OT we know that God is 'not a man that he should lie' - therefore, he is truth personified.

The same principles hold true when we think of the Thummim as meaning 'perfection.' Some of these you will be very familiar with: **his work is perfect** according to Deuteronomy 32:4 - there are no flaws, faults, or failures. We see that in his work of creation and redemption!

His Word is perfect - we glean that from James 1:25 where it refers to 'the perfect law of liberty' and, again, in Psalm 19:7 where it reminds us that 'the law of the Lord is perfect ...'

And, thank God, **his way is perfect** - we read that in Psalm 18:30 ... David testified to this fact after his miraculous deliverance from the hand of Saul; we know it to be true in our lives as well - it's when we look back that we can often see the pieces fit together like a jigsaw.

Paul declares in Romans 12:2 that **his will is perfect** - there is nothing slipshod about his plan and purpose for your life and mine - he knows all that's going on and he's behind the scenes doing what needs to be done ...

then, there's dear ol' Job in 36:4 where the worn down and worn out servant of God affirms that **his wisdom is perfect** - ah, our God never gets it wrong. His hindsight is never better than his foresight - he gets it right in our lives first time, every time. He is an all-wise Father!

The message symbolised in the stones

A couple of weeks back we shone the spotlight on the breastplate of 12 precious stones - we discovered then that it was often referred to as the 'breastplate of judgment' or the 'breastplate of decision' (see 28:29). That says it all, doesn't it.

In other words, it's where decisions are made as we clearly see in 28:15! It's where advice is given, where counsel is passed on - it's where guidance is sought and where answers to life's questions can be received.

I often think of him as the Wonderful Counsellor that we read of in Isaiah 9:7 ... so, in your life and mine, he's on hand to deal with the problems we grapple with day by day - things that would often perplex us and cause us anxiety and worry, those things which are much too personal for us to share with others, things related to the journey of life with its many humps and hollows ... ah, it does not matter what the issue is, Jesus is there with an understanding heart and a listening ear. The message from the breastplate is, I love you. The message from the shoulder onyx stones is, I lift you up, I uphold you. Well, right here in the Urim and the Thummim, the message is, I guide you, I lead you, I direct you each step of the way. As the song tells us, God leads his dear children along!

When the Israelites came to the high priest seeking guidance on some particular matter, he didn't lead them on a wild goose chase, he didn't fumble around - on every occasion, it was

a straightforward answer, yes or no. There were no mistakes. And so it is in your life and mine - our Father knows best and our Father planned it all ... his hand makes every choice and his heart is behind every decision.

There's an old hymn penned by Nathaniel Niles in the late 1800s which puts it like this: *Precious promise God hath given, To the weary passerby; On the way from earth to heaven, I will guide thee with mine eye.*

You see, the breastplate was a piece of material - finely twisted linen - it was square in shape, but according to verse 16 it was to be folded double. That meant it formed a kind of pouch and, so far as we know - reading between the lines in verse 30 - that's where the Urim and Thummim were placed.

With that thought in mind, I recall the words of the hymn composed by Anne Ross Cousin - one you'll know so well:

With mercy and with judgment, My web of time he wove; And always dews of sorrow, Were lustered with his love; I'll bless the hand that guided, I'll bless the heart that planned, When throned where glory dwelleth, In Immanuel's land.

The ministry supplied by the stones

The tremendous privilege and responsibility of giving guidance to the Israelite people was granted to the Levites. Not least, because they did the right thing at the right time - read Exodus 32:25-26 where we have the infamous incident

of the golden calf - we read that 'Moses saw that the people were running wild and that Aaron had let them get out of control and so became a laughing stock to their enemies. So he stood at the entrance to the camp and said, "Whoever is for the Lord, come to me." And all the Levites rallied to him.'

Yes, they stood shoulder to shoulder with Moses when he challenged the people with a clarion call, 'Who is on the Lord's side?' The Levites took a deep breath, in unison they stepped out from among the other tribes and, without giving it a second thought, they stepped up to the plate and nailed their colours to the mast.

In other words, the tribe that was willing to do God's will was the tribe that God honoured with this particular task - God knew he could trust them. Let's take a few minutes and look at some case histories in the Old Testament:

The first one is in Numbers 27:21 where we read of the commissioning of Joshua - he would lead the people forward after the passing of Moses. We see how complete it was to be - the text speaks of their coming in and their going out, both for he himself as well as the congregation of Israel.

We read: 'Joshua is to stand before Eleazar the priest, who will obtain decisions for him by inquiring of the Urim before the Lord. At his command, he and the entire community of the Israelites will go out, and at his command they will come in.'

The second illustration is in 1 Samuel 23:2,4,9 - David in his day wouldn't make a move until he sought the Lord about it. For example, we read in verse 4 that 'once again David inquired of the Lord and the Lord answered him ...'

Number three is a few chapters later in 1 Samuel 28:6 where we note that, in Saul's time, God refused to answer him because he had turned his back on Jehovah ... Saul was scared stiff when he saw the size of the Philistine army - we read that 'terror filled his heart.'

The haunting statement is in verse 6 where it tells us that 'Saul inquired of the Lord, but the Lord did not answer him by dreams or Urim or prophets.' That says something, doesn't it - he was playing fast and loose with the things of God so the Lord turned a deaf ear to his pleadings. A tragic sequel to this cold shoulder from on high is when Saul then resorts to seeking guidance and help from the witch of Endor.

The last one is found in 1 Samuel 30 and it's the familiar incident at Ziklag where David wiped out the Amalekites ... let me walk you through what happened:

There's a day of agony for the army in verses 1-2; there's a day of weeping for the wives in verses 3-4; there's a day of loss for the leader in verse 5; there's a day of distress for David in verse 6; there's a day of rebellion in the ranks in verse 6b; there's a day of enquiry of the ephod in verses 7-8; and there's a day of victory over the victims in verse 9f ...

By the time we come to Ezra 2:61-63 this is the last time the Urim and Thummim are mentioned - the people are back in Jerusalem after their 70 years captivity in Babylon - they wanted a priesthood but no mentioned is made after this of the Urim and Thummim ...

So it all started in the days of Aaron and it ended in the days of David - a period spanning around 450 years. Before Aaron, there were dreams ... after David, we have the prophets. That's how God spoke to his people ...

The method subsequent to these stones

That's the way it was back then ... and that begs the question, How does God guide us today? I love the old hymn by Joseph Gilmore which tells us: *He leadeth me, O blessed thought, O words with heavenly comfort fraught; Whate'er I do, where'er I be, Still 'tis God's hand that leadeth me.*

Well, he certainly guides us by his Holy Spirit - we see evidence of that in the story of Philip the evangelist in Acts 8:26-40 ... the Spirit is spoken of quite a number of times - he moved him on, he prompted him to go south towards Gaza to a place he'd not been to before. There were other times in the early church where we read of the Holy Spirit ministering to the needs of his people and showing them the best way forward.

We know with conviction and can say with loads of confidence that God guides us through his precious Word - an incredible challenge is found in Isaiah 8:19-20 where the people are told the

folly of consulting other mediums - the appeal is 'to the law and the testimony. If they do not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn.' We know from Romans 8 that God will speak to us through his living Word - it's good to realise that the Spirit of God will never lead us contrary to the Word of God.

A third possibility is through circumstances - in other words, the sovereign Lord is the one who opens door and closes doors, and we can trust him to do both for he knows all about our tomorrows. That is borne out in the life of Paul - and we see evidence of it in Acts 16:9 with the Macedonian call.

The distinctive message from the Urim and Thummim is that God leads his people ... and when he leads us, he expects us to follow. I think our testimony can be summed up in the words penned by Fanny Crosby:

All the way my Saviour leads me, What have I to ask beside? Can I doubt his tender mercy, Who through life has been my guide? Heavenly peace, divinest comfort, Here by faith in him to dwell; For I know, whate'er befall me, Jesus doeth all things well.

All the way my Saviour leads me, Cheers each winding path I tread; Gives me grace for every trial, Feeds me with the living bread. Though my weary steps may falter, And my soul athirst may be, Gushing from the rock before me, Lo, a spring of joy I see ... Our song through endless ages, Jesus led me all the way!

