

Moses, still at the top of Mt Sinai, receives instructions about the priesthood

Must be a Levite descended from Aaron

• Special beautiful clothing, eight items in all

The items described

1. The Ephod

• A special colourful apron

• Jewels with the names of the 12 tribes

• Intercessory prayer

2. The breastpiece

• Colourful

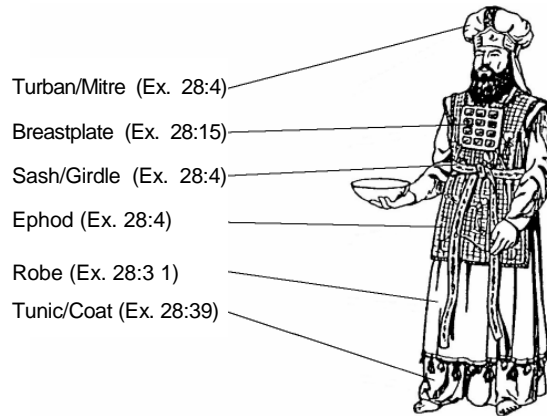
• 12 precious stones with the names of the tribes

The instructions of God to Moses now move to deal with the priests who are to minister in the tabernacle.

We must remember the setting of the story. Moses is still at the top of Mount Sinai. He is being given instructions from God about how Israel must live under law. The entire nation will continue as the people of God by living under priests who are appointed by God. One of the main tasks of the priests will be to administer the worship in the tabernacle. It is all being given to Israel in great detail. Exodus 28:1–43 will be substantially repeated in Exodus 39:1–31.

The high-priest must come from a particular family in a particular tribe. Moses himself is from the tribe of Levi. Now God says to him, 'Bring near to yourself your brother Aaron, and his sons, from among the people of Israel, to do priestly ministry for me: Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar'¹. The priests will be drawn from the descendants of Aaron, who is in a sub-section of the tribe of Levi traced through one of Levi's sons called Kohath². Very beautiful clothing will be specially made for them³. God will raise up specially gifted people to make the costumes⁴. Six items are mentioned here. The priest will have (i) a breastpiece, (ii) an ephod, (iii) a blue robe, (iv) a tunic worn over linen undergarments, (v) a turban and (vi) a sash, all mentioned in 28:4. They will use the colourful materials that will be collected from the people⁵. (Two items are not yet mentioned: the gold plate on the turban, and the linen undergarments.)

Exodus 28:6–14 describes the ephod. The 'ephod' was some kind of over-garment, a lengthy 'apron' that was specially worn by the high-priests.



The high-priest

It was colourful¹. It had special shoulder pieces², and a distinctive 'belt'³. Two special jewels ('onyx stones') were placed on the shoulders⁴. They had the names of the twelve tribes of Israel written on them⁵. Verse 12 explains the symbolism. When the priest went before the LORD inside the tabernacle he was 'remembering' the twelve tribes in **intercessory prayer**. The two engraved stones had gold 'filigree' (wire-work) settings which held them in position⁶ and golden chains that tied them to the ephod⁷.

Exodus 28:15–30 describes the breastpiece. The breastpiece fitted on to the chest-area of the ephod. It was colourful¹ and was folded double so as to make some kind of pocket². It had twelve precious stones on the front, held by gold wire-work³. The name of one of the tribes was written on each precious stone⁴.

Exodus 28:22–28 lets us know how it was attached to the ephod. There were golden cords that tied the breastpiece to the ephod¹. Two gold rings on the breastpiece² were connected by the golden cords to the shoulder-

¹ 28:1
² see 1
 Chronicles 6:1
³ 28:2
⁴ 28:3
⁵ 28:5; see 25:4

¹ 28:6
² 28:7
³ 28:8
⁴ 28:9
⁵ 28:10-11
⁶ 28:13
⁷ 28:14

¹ 28:15
² 28:16
³ 28:17-20
⁴ 28:21

¹ 28:22
² 28:23-24

• Attached to the ephod with golden cords

• Carried the people on his heart

• Dice-like stones for seeking God's counsel

3. The robe

• Long sleeveless apron

• New covenant fulfilment of ritual and ceremony is spiritual authority

• Blue with pomegranates and golden bells

• Sacrifice without dying

4. The golden plate

• A sign that the priests' sins had been atoned for

The remaining smaller items of clothing

5. Short tunic

6. Turban

7. Sash

8. Linen undergarments

pieces^{□3}. The rings were on the lower corners of the breastpiece^{□4}. There were rings also on the shoulder pieces and the two were connected with a blue cord^{□5}.

Exodus 28:29–30 lets us know of the significance of the breastpiece and its jewels. Just as the high-priest interceded for the people carrying them on his shoulders^{□1}, the part of his body which had a lot of his strength, so he also carried them on his heart, the location of his thoughts and feelings. The Urim and Thummim are mentioned here. They were stones kept in the ephod, that could be thrown like dice, and used for seeking God's counsel^{□2}.

Exodus 28:31–35 describes the robe. It was a sleeveless apron reaching down to the ankles. We must distinguish the 'robe' which was long, from the 'tunic' which was short. The tunic was an under-wear tunic. The robe was worn over the tunic^{□1} but under the ephod^{□2}. Whenever this Hebrew word (*m^e 'il*) is used it seems to point to the official or privileged position of the person wearing the robe. People still today wear robes to mark out an official or privileged position. Some like dressing up in uniforms. Under the New Covenant arrangements spiritual position is nothing other than the recognition of the anointing of the Holy Spirit. **Spiritual authority** is the fulfilment of the ritual and ceremonial authority of the Old Testament priests.

The robe was blue in colour^{□1}. It had an opening for the head and a woven edge^{□2}. On the bottom it had 'pomegranates' and golden bells alternately^{□3}. It was a sign that he was the high-priest and could go into the presence of the LORD, at certain times, with the blood of sacrifice, without dying. The bells were heard by those outside who knew that he was still alive^{□4}.

Exodus 28:36–38 describes the golden plate that was attached to the priest's turban. It had engraved on it the words 'Holy to the LORD'^{□1}. It was fastened by a blue cord^{□2}. It was very conspicuous, for the small sign-board was on the high-priest's forehead. It was a sign that the high-priest had atoned for the sinful aspects of the priest's work. Even the 'holy things' needed atonement^{□3}.

Exodus 28:39–43 describes the remaining smaller items of clothing. The high-priest had to wear a tunic, a turban and a sash^{□1}. Also there was a 'cap' or 'headband'^{□2}. They were 'for glory and for beauty'^{□3} and had to be worn by the high-priest when he was doing his work. Aaron and his sons could only be appointed to office after they were wearing these garments^{□4}. They also had to wear 'linen undergarments'^{□5}. If they approach the altar dressed in any other way, they would come under God's displeasure^{□6}.

The Old Testament does not completely make clear in what order the various items of clothing were put on. But Josephus, the Jewish historian, tells us how they were put on (and there were high-priests still in the early days of his lifetime). In his *Antiquities* 3:7 he says that the high-priest put on his clothes in this order: under-garment, tunic, sash, turban (with gold-plate, I suppose) blue robe, and the ephod (with the breastplate). It all pictured Jesus, ready to be our great priest.

□3 28:25
 □4 28:26
 □5 28:27-28
 □1 28:12
 □2 see also
 Leviticus 8:8;
 Numbers 27:21;
 Deuteronomy
 33:8; 1 Samuel
 28:6; Ezra 2:63;
 Nehemiah 7:65)

□1 see 28:39
 □2 see Leviticus
 8:7

□1 28:31`
 □2 28:32
 □3 28:33-34
 □4 28:35

□1 28:36
 □2 28:37
 □3 28:38

□1 28:39
 □2 28:40
 □3 28:40
 □4 28:41
 □5 28:42
 □6 28:43



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