

**The symbolism of the priests' garments**

• *Ordained by God – not invented by man*

1. *The ephod – intercessory prayer*

• *Jesus – our intercessor and greatest source of confidence*

2. *The breastplate – sympathy*

• *Jesus – our sympathetic High Priest*

3. *The robe – the official and privileged position of the wearer*

• *Jesus appointed by God for us*

4. *The tunic – righteousness of life*

• *Jesus – totally obedient*

5. *The turban – submissiveness*

Just as Exodus 38:21–31 has summarised the metals used in the tabernacle, so now Exodus 39:1–31 summarises the garments of the priesthood. Exodus 39:1 makes a basic statement and then 39:2–31 gives details. We have mention of the ephod<sup>☐1</sup> (*'ephod*), the breastpiece<sup>☐2</sup> (*choshen*), the robe<sup>☐3</sup> (*m<sup>e</sup>il*), the tunics<sup>☐4</sup> (*k<sup>e</sup>toneth*), the turban<sup>☐5</sup> (*mitsnepheth*), the linen undergarments<sup>☐6</sup> (*miknesey-bad*), the sash<sup>☐7</sup> (*'abnet*), and the gold plate<sup>☐8</sup> (*tsits*). All eight items of the priests' clothing are mentioned. Seven times it is emphasised that these garments were made exactly as the Lord commanded Moses<sup>☐9</sup>. These garments are ordained by God. There was no human invention.

1. Exodus 39:2–7 describes the ephod (repeating what we have seen in Exodus 28:6–14). When the priest went before the LORD inside the tabernacle he was 'remembering' the twelve tribes in **intercessory prayer**.

Jesus is our Great High Priest who ever is in the presence of the Father. He permanently and unceasingly puts to the Father a request that our faith will not fail, and that we shall get to be where He is in glory. It is our greatest source of confidence, since Jesus gets His prayers answered.

2. Exodus 39:8–21 describes the breastpiece (repeating what we have had in 28:15–30). Just as the high-priest interceded for the people carrying them on his shoulders, the area of his strength, so he also carried them on his heart, the location of his thoughts and feelings. The breastpiece spoke of **sympathy**.

Jesus was brought into this world to be a human being capable of suffering every possible kind of distress that we suffer, including the greatest distress of all – intense temptation. He still retains a fellow-feeling for us as He presents Himself to the Father on our behalf. We can be quite confident that Jesus feels for us (without showing sinful partiality) in any distress or temptation we may experience.

3. Exodus 39:22–26 describes the robe (and may be compared with 28:31–35). It was a sleeveless apron reaching down to the ankles. It indicated the **official and privileged position** of the person wearing the robe. The pomegranates and bells on the robe meant that his walking around within the tabernacle could be heard. The Christian similarly lives on the knowledge of the work of his Great High Priest.

Jesus' position in heaven as our Saviour and Mediator is official. Jesus has not intruded Himself into a position which does not belong to Him. The Father is the source of our salvation. He loves us and has appointed His Son to the work of bringing us to glory.

4. Exodus 39:27 mentions the tunic<sup>☐1</sup>, a shorter garment than the robe. It was made of linen and seems to symbolise **righteousness of life**. 'Let the priests be clothed with righteousness' says Psalm 132:9.

Jesus had to live a life of total godliness and obedience in order to be our Saviour. One sinner would not be able to save another sinner. If Jesus had sinned even in the slightest He would have ruined His work as our Saviour. But He obeyed the Father in thought, in word, in deed, in leaving nothing undone of the Father's will. He is fully qualified to be our Saviour in the presence of God.

5. Exodus 39:28a mentions the turban<sup>☐1</sup>. It speaks of **submissiveness, and willingness to have personal characteristics covered** (since the hair with its colour and its style is a very personal and

☐1 39:2-7  
 ☐2 39:8-21  
 ☐3 39:22-26  
 ☐4 39:27  
 ☐5 39:28a  
 ☐6 39:28b  
 ☐7 39:29  
 ☐8 39:30-31  
 ☐9 39:1, 5, 7, 21, 26, 29, 31

☐1 compare 28:39

☐1 compare 28:39

• *Jesus – submission to His father*

6. *The linen undergarments – decorum – pure and clean*

7. *The sash-readiness for action*  
 • *Jesus – ever ready*

8. *The golden plate – dedication*

• *Jesus' righteousness brings us acceptance*

• *Our dedicated godly living follows and brings both honour to God and reward to us*

**covered** (since the hair with its colour and its style is a very personal and distinctive part of our appearance; one thinks of how Absalom gloried in his hair). Jesus was willing to say 'Not my will but your will be done ...' He was not living for personal glory but for the possibility of bring glory to His Father.



6. Exodus 39:28b mentions the linen undergarments. It speaks of **decorum**, freedom from the suspicion of impurity. Our Great High Priest does His work without the shadow of a hint of anything that would be impure or unclean.

7. Exodus 39:29 mentions the sash<sup>☞1</sup>. It speaks of **readiness for action**. One's clothing has to be 'girded' if speedy action is to take place. Jesus was ever ready to do the Father's will. He would sacrifice His comforts, ignore His hunger or tiredness, surrender His very life, in order to do God's will.

8. Exodus 39:30–31 describes the golden plate that was attached to the priest's turban. (We had earlier mention of it in 28:36–38.) It had engraved on it the words 'Holy to the LORD'. It emphasized the **dedication** of the high-priest to the work of Yahweh. It was always on his forehead so that the people might be accepted before Yahweh<sup>☞1</sup>. Jesus is our righteousness before the Father. **He** is holy that **we** might be accepted. Our holiness does not bring us acceptance; it brings us reward. There is a very great difference. It would be entirely false teaching for us to think that our righteousness (which is feeble at best) brings us acceptance before God. No, not at all. It is Jesus' righteousness that brings us acceptance before God. Our feeble righteousness comes along afterward when our Great High Priest has already given us acceptability before the Father. We are justified without and before any works of righteousness that we perform. Our godly living is not a rival to the righteousness of Jesus on our behalf. It is simply a way of honouring God; it is looking for His reward. Those who honour God are honoured by God. But acceptance comes from our Great High Priest. 'Holy to the LORD' is written always on his forehead, so that the people of God might be accepted before the Father.

☞1 compare 28:39

☞1 see 28:38

	<p>Dr Michael Eaton is highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. He lives in Kenya where he is one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship. His <i>Preaching Through The Bible (PTTB)</i> books are highly popular worldwide. Michael Eaton puts the theological and practical meaning of the Bible in a clear and down-to-earth way so that what is written can be easily understood by the reader.</p>	
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