

UNIT 54: THE CLOTHING OF THE PRIESTS (Exodus 28:1-43; 39:1-30)

Critical scholarship finds this chapter and the next too elaborate for the wilderness congregation. The common view is that the elaborately developed clothing is based on the Zadokite priesthood of the writer's (to them, P's) day, but referred back to Moses for its appointment. Most of the material describes the gorgeous clothing of the High Priest, with only brief mention of the ordinary priests. There is no compelling reason why this should be late—it is dated late by these scholars because it is assumed to be P, and P is assumed to be late (although many scholars who accept J, E, D, and P in principle put P in the pre-monarchic period!).

The exposition will have to give a brief background of the priesthood, and a comparison to the New Testament spiritual leadership. Naturally, our High Priest immediately comes to mind in the comparison, and that is a worthy comparison. But beyond that we may probe the spiritual or symbolical significance of the clothing in order to understand spiritual principles for spiritual leaders.

The passage could be divided as follows: instructions for preparing ministerial garments (28:1-5), details of the distinctive garments of the priest (28:6-39), warning against deviating from these instructions (28:40-43). If an epilogue should be added, then comments from 39:1-30 on their obedient compliance would be appropriate.

I. God requires his chosen ministers to reflect his holy nature (29:1-5).

This is the *what* of the chapter, what it is all about. The next section will detail how it should be done, and the final section will explain what happens if it is not carried out.

Many important expressions occur in these first few verses. Moses was instructed to take Aaron to himself that he (and his sons) may serve as priests. "Take" here is *haqreb*, the word throughout Leviticus for "offer." The word for serving as priest is actually *kahan*. So this family now was to be set apart for

ministry according to the call of God.

The second verse instructs that special clothing be made for them. The clothing is called *bigde qodesh*, "holy garments." These would be distinct enough to set the priests apart from the common man. The twofold purpose of them was "for honor" and "for dignity" (*kabod* and *tiph'aret*). These two words are synonyms and may here be in a hendiadys construction. The clothing gave dignity, honor, and presence among the people. They were to represent God, and that representation was to be uplifting, striking, honorable, and unique.

The means by which these would be made was also from God. Wise-hearted men whom God filled with "the Spirit of wisdom" were to do the work. These skills were God-given, to prepare clothing for priests chosen by God. There then follows an overview of the different pieces.

II. God requires his ministers to be prepared to fulfill the tasks of the ministry (28:6-39).

God actually clothes his ministers with functions. The detailed descriptions to follow should be noted as to their significance of God's investing so much time in the specifics. Everything here too is divine *torah*, to be carried out to the letter. If they are to reflect His nature they are to function as He would have them do, with the equipment he would require.

Intercession

First comes the ephod, which speaks of the minister as a mediator, making intercession for the people he bears up before the LORD (6-14). Wearing the stones of the tribes was a symbolic way of representing the people before God. Naturally, Jesus Christ our High Priest has done this graphically in the presence of the Father. Yet, the principle of making intercession, of bearing up the congregation before the LORD, is valid.

Counsel

Second is the breast piece, which speaks of the minister making decisions, giving counsel from the LORD (15-30). Aaron was to bear on his heart the decisions of the people. In short, he was responsible to reveal the will of the LORD to them. We do not divine by the *Urim* and *Thummim* today, but by taking the

revealed will of God we may discover all God's decisions.

Authority

Third, the robe, bells, turban and sash (31-39) express the minister's authority in the presence of the LORD, an authority based on holiness in conformity to God's holiness. The robe and the bells speak of the priest's right in the presence of God (31-35), preventing him from death. Apparently the bells reminded him and God of the need for being there. The turban was to have a plate saying "Holiness to the LORD" reminding all of the basic need of the congregation (36-39). So holiness and purity were demanded of the spiritual leaders.

III. God warns ministers to safeguard the holiness of their service (28:40-43).

To minister in the Holy Place was an awesome responsibility. God demanded that it be taken seriously. So the ministers were to make intercession for the people, give decisions from God's revealed will, enter His presence in purity, and represent holiness to the LORD. His clothing provided for these functions, but in a way that brought honor and dignity. He was, therefore, to serve in purity, holiness, and fear (see Malachi). The main theme or big idea could be worded this way:

***Those whom God selects to minister to the congregation
through intercessory prayer, divine counsel, and sacrificial worship
must always represent the holiness of the LORD in their activities.***