

# ***Garments of Grace: Clothing Imagery in the Bible***

## ***The Priestly Garments of Grace***

Lesson #5 for April 30, 2011

Scriptures: Exodus 28; 32:1-6; Leviticus 21:7-22:8; Revelation 21:12-14; Hebrews 4:14,15.

1. A study of the last half of the book of Exodus and the book of Leviticus will make it very clear that God gave a lot of detail about what the priests were supposed to wear and how they were supposed to behave. That was particularly true of the high priest. With space in the Bible so precious, why all those details? The book of Genesis covers at least half of this world's history! Why don't we have more details on that? This material is all about worship and God.
2. God chose Bezalel of the tribe of Judah and Oholiab of the tribe of Dan and gave them special skills to be able to make all of those detailed parts of the sanctuary and of the priests' garments. Where do you think they got the material, especially the gems for the breastpiece or breastplate? They got it from the Egyptians before they left. (Exodus 12:35,36)
3. Read Leviticus 21:7-22:8. With all the rituals for cleanliness, purity, and holiness that the priests were asked to perform, it is very clear that God wanted them to be a special and unique group of people. They were to be separate and holy, different from ordinary people. If we are supposed to be a royal priesthood, (1 Peter 2:9; compare Exodus 19:3-5) does that not imply that we should also be different from the world around us?
4. A number of specific instructions were given regarding the priest's clothing and behavior to clearly differentiate them from the fertility-cult priests of the nations around them. Priests were only allowed to marry virgins—not former prostitutes, not widows, and not divorced women. (Leviticus 21:13,14) If a priest's daughter became a prostitute, she was to be burned to death. In this context, it is interesting to note that Jezebel was the daughter of a pagan fertility-cult high priest. (1 Kings 16:31; compare Hosea 1-3)
5. Although it was typical for the people to tear their clothes and leave their hair uncombed in a time of mourning, the priests were not to appear that way. They were not to enter the house of a dead person unless it was a parent, child, brother, or unmarried sister who was living in the same home. They were not to have any physical defect and no serious skin disease. They were not to have any kind of a discharge. They were not to touch any corpse. They were to eat specific foods and portions of meat set aside for them from the offerings at the tabernacle. They were never to touch an animal that had died of natural causes or had been killed by wild animals.
6. There are some contradictory ideas in this lesson. Jesus Christ is supposed to be our great High Priest in the heavens above. But, as Protestants we are supposed to believe in the "priesthood of all believers." More than that, we are supposed to be "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people." (1 Peter 2:9, *NASB*) If we are supposed to be priests, do we need a Priest to speak to God on our behalf? (John 16:25-27) 1 Timothy 2:5 says, "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." Isn't that the role of a priest? Priests were dedicated to one particular God. Does Jesus represent God to us, or us to God? Or both? There is no way we could know anything about God if He had not revealed Himself to us.
7. Protestant Christians believe that there is no longer a need for a human priesthood.
8. There are four distinct priesthoods spoken of in Scripture. The first is the priesthood of Melchizedek. (Genesis 14:18-20; Psalm 110:4) The second is the priesthood of Aaron in the Old Testament about which we are primarily studying in this lesson. The third is the priesthood

of Christ which is described as being after the order of Melchizedek. And the fourth is the priesthood of which we are supposed to be a part. How are these four priesthoods related? In what ways are they different? Are we like Melchizedek, Aaron, and Jesus? (Matthew 5:16) People are supposed to see in us the light of God shining forth and as a result give glory to God in heaven. Is that our modern equivalent of those high priestly garments?

9. One thing is clear. Except for the priesthood of Jesus Christ Himself, all priests are sinners. Aaron is a prime example. Very soon after giving in to the wishes of the people and making the golden calf at the foot of Mount Sinai, he was forgiven and made to be the high priest of the nation. He was given a number of very special privileges, most in connection with his brother Moses—he was Moses' mouthpiece. He was taken up into Mount Sinai and was one of the leaders of Israel.
10. A well-known biblical principle is that "from everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded." (Luke 12:48, *NIV*) Have not we, as Seventh-day Adventists, been given the most complete revelation of God and His plan that has been given to any people in the history of the world? We have not only the Bible but also the writings of Ellen White to guide us. So, how did we end up as Laodicea? We have managed to avoid beliefs in doctrines such as the eternal torment in hell, Sunday sacredness, etc. Does this mean that we are held especially accountable because we have access to so much truth?
11. Our lesson suggests that the garments that the high priest wore were supposed to represent the character of God. In what way do you see God's character represented by the high priest's garments? Today, God's people do not wear such garments. In what way are we supposed to represent the character of God?
12. What kind of effect do you think those beautiful garments had upon the people when they saw the high priest wearing them? In the Victorian age from which the Seventh-day Adventist Church arose, virtually all Protestant churches believed that jewelry should not be worn. In that light, how do we explain all of the beautiful adornment on the high priest? Is it okay to wear precious gems even in great number if you are told to do so by God?
13. The list of gems found on the breastplate that the high priest wore is interesting to consider. (Exodus 28:17-21) Apparently, each gem had the name of one of the tribes of Israel connected to it or actually on it. Scholars recognize that we do not know the identification of virtually any of those gems. Some of the names mean things like *to shine, polished, hard*, or suggest colors like red, green, or yellow. The names we read in English are all guesses. Will any of those sacred garments be preserved in heaven so we can see them? It is quite certain that the one the Bible calls *turquoise* was actually *lapis-lazuli*.
14. Can you think of any parallels between the garments worn by the high priest in Aaron's day and the robe of Christ's righteousness that we are supposed to wear in our day? Some people want each detail to have meaning of some kind. The garments were to be beautiful and dignified. (Exodus 28:40)
15. In Old Testament times, there were three main groups through which God worked: 1) the kings, 2) the priesthood, and 3) the prophets. What kind of people did God choose to serve Him in those capacities? In 1972, a journalist named David Halberstam published a book called *The Best and the Brightest*. In that book he outlined how a group of men and women who were considered to be the brightest available for the purpose drew up plans for the war in Vietnam. Then he asked, "How could those best and brightest people have been so wrong?"
16. Scan through the Old Testament in your mind. What kind of people did God choose to serve Him in the Bible? Did He choose only mediocre men and women? Or, did He choose the very best that were available at any given time? What would you say about men like King Saul or

Solomon? (1 Kings 11) What about the sons of Eli and Samuel? (1 Samuel 2:12-17) What about Moses who was a murderer, Jonah who ran in the opposite direction when God called him, or Paul who was a persecutor and a destroyer of Christians? All of these examples point us to the fact that God's priests—that is us—are always, at best, repentant sinners.

17. Read Exodus 28:4, *GNB*:

Tell them to make a breastpiece, an ephod, a robe, an embroidered shirt, a turbine, and a sash. They are to make these priestly garments for your brother Aaron and his sons, so that they can serve me as priests.

18. If you take time to look at the context in Exodus and in Leviticus, you will realize that God left no detail unspecified. Why did God think that it was necessary to be so detailed in describing the clothing that the priests should wear? Ellen White says:

The pattern of the priestly robes was made known to Moses in the mount. Every article the high priest was to wear, and the way it should be made, were specified. These garments were consecrated to a most solemn purpose. By them was **represented the character of the great antitype**, Jesus Christ. They covered the priest with glory and beauty, and made the dignity of his office to appear. When clothed with them, the priest presented himself as a **representative of Israel, showing by his garments the glory that Israel should reveal to the world as the chosen people of God.**—Ellen G. White, *The Youth's Instructor*, June 7, 1900; *5BC* 1104.5.

Notice the wording: the priest was to represent “the character of the great antitype” and was “a representative of Israel.”

19. As you can imagine, a great deal has been written down through the centuries about the supposed meaning of each of those articles of clothing. Certainly, they were supposed to represent the beauty, the perfection, the holiness, and the dignity of the great Anti-type, Jesus our High Priest, as well as the characters that the Israelites were supposed to develop to represent God to the world.

20. If you read Exodus 28 in one of the more traditional translations, you will notice some interesting wording in verses 12, 29, 30, 38, and 42. The High Priest *bore* on his shoulder straps the names of the tribes of Israel; he *bore* on his breastplate the gemstones with the names of the tribes; and inside the breastplate, he *bore* the Urim and Thummim. He also *bore* an ornament on his forehead of pure gold written with the words, “Holy to the Lord.” He was expected to wear linen shorts so as not to be killed for exposing himself while carrying out his duties as a priest. Some have suggested that all of this “bearing” is a parallel to the fact that Christ bears our sins. Is this an obvious parallel in your mind? Those articles of clothing do not immediately make us think of sins!

21. Read Genesis 14:18-20 and Hebrews 7:1-14. The earliest priesthood mentioned in Scriptures is that of Melchizedek. Almost the only thing we know about him is his name, a name which implies that he was a “king of righteousness” and a “king of peace.” Should that be a description of the priesthood in our day? It is interesting to note that among the tribes of Israel, members of the tribe of Judah were to be the kings while members of the tribe of Levi were to be the priests. Church and state were to be kept separate. They were instructed never to cross those two so that no one person could be both king and priest. However, Melchizedek was both, and Jesus Christ was both. In passing, we note that even though the biblical history is about the family and descendants of Abraham, there were others—like Melchizedek and Job—living in those times who were true worshipers of God.

22. What do we know about the Urim and Thummim? (Exodus 28:15-30) Those two very special “oracular” stones were carried inside a kind of pouch on which were located the 12 gems with

the names of the 12 tribes of Israel. The fact that the stones were each different suggests that different kinds of people are supposed to make up the kingdom of God. Because the names of the children of Israel were written in several locations on the priest's attire including the breastpiece right over his chest, it could honestly be said that right over his heart he bore their names with him everywhere he went. That would suggest that the Lord regards us with great tenderness and love.

23. We have already suggested that the breastplate was actually more like a pouch or container which carried the Urim and Thummim. Most literally, the terms *Urim* and *Thummim* could be translated *lights* and *perfections*. Tracing the meanings back, they could imply *guilt* versus *innocence* or even possibly *cursed* versus *faultless*. Remember that those two stones were to be used to help answer questions put to God. When the answer was *yes*, the Urim would shine brightly. When the answer was *no*, the Thummim would turn darker. What would happen if those stones were available today?
24. The only time mentioned in Scripture where the Urim and Thummim were actually used to determine God's will was after Jonathan had won a great victory for the children of Israel but in the process ate some honey which according to his father's edict was not supposed to be done. It was the Urim and Thummim that were used to determine that the guilt was not on the side of the people but on the side of Saul and his son and then more specifically on the side of Jonathan himself. (1 Samuel 14) The light that shone from the Urim seems to have been a kind of "searching light" or "spotlight." The stones were to point out the truth. They were to determine guilt or innocence. Therefore, they could be thought of as "judgment stones."
25. Many Christians rejoice in the fact that Jesus as our great High Priest is standing in God's presence and pleading on our behalf. Some of us in the Protestant tradition believe that that is not actually necessary because God the Father Himself loves us. (Romans 8; John 16:25-27)
26. In what sense are we to be dressed like Aaron was? Dating back to their Victorian roots, conservative modern Christians frown on a lot of jewelry. Would you say that the attire of Aaron had a lot of jewelry in it?
27. Read Hebrews 8:8-13 and Jeremiah 31:31-34. God wants to make a new covenant agreement with us. He wants us to open our lives and our hearts to Him so that He can write His law in our hearts. In turn, if we are true Christians, we will seek to live out God's righteousness in our own lives so others may see. If we did that, would our lives stand out in contrast to the people of the world?
28. What was the primary purpose of the priest in Old Testament times? Was his primary job to represent human beings to God? Or, was it rather to represent God to human beings? As we minister to other people in our day, do we give glory to God? Do you feel like a king or a priest? What about a "royal priesthood"? Does God still have a lot of work to do in us? How can we get on with that work? If ancient Israel was supposed to represent God to the world of their day, shouldn't we be doing the same in our day? With all of the light that we have, shouldn't we be doing much better than they did? If we do not do any better than they did, it is going to be a long time before the second coming! Does God care about the way we live, dress, speak, and act?

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