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MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL

Sermon

Old Testament Picture of High Priest



Part 4/23

God's Last Word: An Exposition of Hebrews By Derek Prince

In our previous session we got to the end of Hebrews 2 and we could just quickly glance again at those closing words. That is, Hebrews 2:17–18 where we have the first mention in the text of high priest which is a key point in the unfolding revelation. I pointed out last time that this passage at the end of chapter 2 points out three ways in which Jesus is qualified to help us as our high priest. Also in chapter 2 from verse 6 to the end, the writer emphasizes the complete identification of Jesus with humanity.

Now, tonight in our opening session I propose to deal further with the theme of high priest. I realize that for the great majority of people this is something that is totally unfamiliar to our religious way of thinking. Those of us that have read the Old Testament—and that isn't necessarily all of us—have read about a high priest. High priest is also mentioned in the New Testament but apart from this epistle to the Hebrews he's only mentioned in a historical way as being the religious, and in some sense, the secular ruler of the Jewish people in the time of Jesus. And much of what is said about him is not very favorable.

However, the high priesthood of Jesus, as I've said, is the central theme of this epistle. And you can't appreciate it very fully until you have some concept of who the high priest was, what his functions were, and why he was so tremendously important. For that actually you have to go back to the Old Testament. There is much written about the high priest in the Old Testament, mainly I suppose, in the two books of Exodus and Leviticus. We cannot go through all those passages but I've singled out one passage which probably presents the high priest in as vivid a way as any passage of the Bible. That is, Exodus 28.

Now before we turn there, in your outline at the bottom of Page 2/3, you'll find a reference in Hebrews 5:1. Let's turn there for a moment. The reason for this reference is it defines the functions of a priest. These are extremely important. I really challenge or question whether most of you if suddenly asked what are the functions of a priest would be able to give a clear or scriptural answer. And yet, much of Scripture is interwoven with this theme. They're stated there in Hebrews 5:1, I'll give you my extemporary translation.

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> "For every high priest being taken from among men is appointed on behalf of men in things pertaining to God, in order that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins..."

The one key word that's always associated with the priest is the word sacrifice. Essentially, in the Bible only a priest was qualified to offer sacrifice. As a matter of fact, in the book of 1 Samuel King Saul lost his kingdom because he transgressed that regulation, usurped the place of a priest and offered sacrifice.

The other thing that a priest offers is gifts. It's very important to understand that in God's scheme of things there can be no basis for anyone to have an ongoing relationship with God apart from two things: a priest and a covenant. God does not entertain a relationship on a permanent basis with any human being without these two prerequisites: a priest and a covenant. If you have an ongoing relationship with God, which I trust you do, whether you realize it or not—and quite likely you don't realize it—your relationship is based upon having a priest and a covenant. Without that, God will not entertain a relationship permanently with anybody. There may be a temporary transaction, but no permanent relationship.

The two functions of a priest are: first of all, to offer sacrifices on behalf of the sins of men because until the sin issue is dealt with nobody can have access to God. The barrier between God and man is sin. The only remedy for sin is a God appointed sacrifice. Consequently, for any person to have access to God, the sin question must be dealt with by a sacrifice. The only person authorized to offer a sacrifice is a priest. So we are totally dependent on a priest for access to God.

The other function of a priest mentioned here is to receive gifts from men offered to God. We live in such a democratic culture that we can scarcely conceive the fact that it is not in order for any of us to go up to God and say, "Hey God, I've got ten dollars for your project." It's not permissible. We require a priest to present our gift to God. Otherwise, we cannot give God gifts. So for two essential things—the offering of sacrifice and the presenting of gifts—we are dependent on a priest.

Then, if you turn over the page in your note outline we look also for a moment in Hebrews 8:4–5 which brings out another principle in relationship to the priestly ordinances of the Old Testament. Talking about the priests of the Levitical order it says this:

> "If He [Jesus] were upon the earth, He would not even be a priest, because there are already those priests who offer gifts according to the Law; who serve in [or just serve] a copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was warned as he was about to construct the tabernacle; for, 'See,' he said, 'that you make all things according to the pattern which was shown you on the mount.'"

So when Moses was about to construct the tabernacle, the final word of instruction he got was be careful that you make everything in this earthly tabernacle according to the pattern which was shown you on the mount.

Now we're going to return to Hebrews 8 hopefully in due course so I only want to bring that out, two points about the priest. First of all, a priest is essential for an ongoing relationship with God. He has two primary functions: to offer sacrifices for sins and to present men's gifts to God.

Secondly, the Levitical priest described in the Law of Moses was serving in a tabernacle which was a copy and shadow of a heavenly tabernacle. It was not original. The original tabernacle is in heaven. When we get to chapter 8 we'll look into that more fully.

Now I say that because when we look now at the description of the high priest that we're going to study in Exodus 28, I want you to realize all of it in one way or another tells us something about the heavenly priesthood. It's like, in a way, being able to interpret a language or a set of symbols. There is a very definite symbolism in the Old Testament, which, if we can understand it, reveals to us realities on the heavenly plane.

Let's go to Exodus 28. Exodus 28 describes the garments that were ordained for the high priest. For me it is a very, very vivid and beautiful picture. I hope I can communicate it that way to you. As some of you know from my personal testimony, I started to study the Bible on my own and I spent probably four or five years in the deserts of North Africa reading the Bible without a preacher or a church. Once the Holy Spirit came into my life I really never had any lack of clarity about the symbolism of these passages. I never studied a book, it just was that way. Now I'm not saying I'm right but I'm just saying that's the only way I can see it. And I hope I can communicate it to you because it's very, very rich.

It's an amazing thing, but when I read and study what the Old Testament says about the tabernacle it produces in me a greater longing for God and for holiness than any other passage of the Bible. That might seem extraordinary but it's true. And I believe that's what it's designed to do. In a sense it makes me feel homesick for heaven because it becomes so vivid to me.

Now we're going to turn to Exodus 28 and I'm going to read it section by section from the New American Standard simply because I've come to observe that it confuses you if I go from one version to another. I think you have enough problems putting your fingers in three different passages without having to do it in two different Bibles! So although I would prefer to use the NIV, I'll stick with the NASB. Exodus 28:1:

> "Then bring near to yourself Aaron your brother, and his sons with him, from among the sons of Israel, to minister as priest to Me —Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar, Aaron's sons."

The word "to minister as priest" is a single verb in Hebrew, kohen. How many of you have heard the name Cohen? Almost everybody. Okay. Cohen is the Hebrew word for priest. This verb is formed from that. Everybody called Cohen, theoretically, is descended from Aaron. And they have special obligations today among the Jewish people. If you have the name Cohen, or any other derivatives or forms of it, you are not permitted, even today in Israel, to marry a divorced woman. So there are certain regulations that still carry over from the days of Moses. I happen to know a lady who got into tremendous difficulties because she wanted to marry a divorced man and she was a Cohen. As a matter of fact, I'm rather proud to say that amongst my adopted daughters I have three Cohens and one Katz. Now Katz is just Cohen in another form. It's Cohen-zedek, priest of righteousness. That's obvious, I don't need to go into that any further, do I? All right. As I say from time to time, there's no extra charge for all that.

Now we come to the garments which are to be made. Verses 2–4:

> "And you shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother, for glory and for beauty."

Three important words there: holy, glory and beauty. That's the essence of this whole theme.

> "And you shall speak to all the skillful persons ..."

I think the alternative reading in the margin is "wise of heart." I want you to notice that in the Bible craftsmanship is wisdom. It's been so much downgraded in contemporary culture, but wise people are craftsmen in the Bible.

> "... whom I have endowed with the spirit of wisdom ..."

To do what? Not to preach sermons but to make garments. Isn't that exciting!

> "... whom I have endowed with the spirit of wisdom, [to] make Aaron's garments to consecrate him, that he may minister as priest to Me."

Verse 4, we get a list of the garments.

> "And these are the garments which they shall make: a breastpiece [alternatively translated a pouch] and an ephod and a robe and a tunic ... a turban and a sash ..."

That's six garments. Let me go over them once more. Number one, a breastpiece. Number two, an ephod. Number three, a robe. Number four, a tunic. Number five, a turban. You know what a turban is, it goes on the head. And number six, a sash.

Now, my instinct immediately tells me that list isn't complete. Why? Because there has to be seven, that's right. The seventh is very clearly there, keep your finger in that page and turn on to chapter 28:36– 37:

> "You shall also make a plate of pure gold and shall engrave on it, like the engravings of a seal, 'Holy to the LORD [ko-desh la adoni].' And you shall fasten it on a blue cord, and it shall be on the turban; it shall be at the front of the turban."

So his attire was not complete with the six garments. On top of the turban there had to be fastened this gold plate with a blue ribbon and the gold plate proclaimed "Holy to the Lord."

Going back now to verse 5 we get the materials.

> "And they shall take the gold and the blue and the purple and the scarlet material and the fine linen."

There are five basic materials. And I have put there what I believe to be the symbolical meaning of those materials. The first is a metal, gold. And it's really interesting in contemporary society that gold never loses its value. You can still buy a house with just as much gold as you could have bought a house for thirty or forty years ago. You can't say that about dollars but you can about gold. Gold has not changed its value. Gold, in my understanding, represents the nature of God, divinity, and together with that, holiness.

Now there are two other main metals that are not mentioned here but are frequently mentioned. Silver and copper [or brass]. And I don't have any question in my mind as to the symbolical meanings. Silver stands for redemption and brass or copper stands for judgment. Interestingly, it states about the temple that Solomon built, "No one could weigh or measure all the copper that was in it." And the Scriptures says, "God's judgments are past searching out"—nobody can ever weigh the judgments of God. That's just one way that you can apply this symbolism.

Blue is heavenly. Everybody knows the color of heaven is blue!

Let's go on for a minute and come back to purple. The next is scarlet, the color of blood, the color of humanity. You need to bear in mind that the name of the first man was Adam. The Hebrew for earth is adamah and the Hebrew for blood is dam. So right in the middle of "Adam" is the word for blood.

Now you can go into theories—and I never try to push them on people—but I believe the distinctive feature of our earthly body is it has blood. I question whether our resurrection body will have blood in it. When Jesus appeared with His resurrection body He said, "I have flesh and bones," but He did not mention blood. The reason—I'm getting myself out of my depth—the reason being the soul of all flesh is in the blood. And the first and the natural body is a soulish body, but the second resurrection body is a spiritual body, 1 Corinthians 15:45–47. We have then, I believe, scarlet: the color of humanity in its earthly existence.

And of course, you don't have to be an artist to know purple comes through mingling blue and scarlet. So purple is mingled heavenly and earthly. Purple is also the color of royalty. In the New Testament purple was the specific color reserved for kings and emperors. To "wear the purple" was to become emperor of Rome.

There's one passage which is so vivid to me I'd like you to turn to it. Keep your finger in Exodus 28 and turn to John 19:2–5.

> "And the soldiers wove a crown of thorns and put it on His head, and arrayed Him in a purple robe; and they began to come up to Him, and say, 'Hail, King of the Jews!' and to give Him blows in the face. And Pilate came out again, and said to them, 'Behold, I am bringing Him out to you, that you may know that I find no guilt in Him.' Jesus therefore came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. And Pilate said to them, 'Behold, the Man!'"

That's a tremendous statement. He was the oracle of God when he said that, just as the high priest had been the oracle of God when he said, "It's fitting that one man should die for the people and not all the people." He made a prophetic statement of the reason for the death of Jesus. "Behold, the Man!" Ha adam, "the man" in Hebrew. I believe Jesus was "the man," the only man who was the man. He was what every man should have been and no other man ever became. And He was the representative of Adam. When Adam sinned, the Lord cursed the earth and said, "Thorns and thistles would it bring forth." When Jesus took the curse of the earth upon Him He wore the crown of thorns and the purple robe of the thistle. But He was also set apart as the King of the Jews. A very difficult position to fill, the king of the Jews. There was the qualification. He took the curse, shed His blood, redeemed His people. And in it we see the mingling of the heavenly and the earthly.

Going back now to Exodus 28:5, it's going to be difficult for me to stay anchored tonight but I'm going to try. We have the fifth material, the fine linen, which all through the Bible speaks of purity and righteousness. And in this passage it's carefully emphasized that the linen is twined or woven. For a moment, just turn to Revelation 19:7–8.

> "'Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself

> ready.' And it was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean [or shining and clean]; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints."

It's woven; it's worked on. It's one thing to have righteousness imputed to you by faith, it's another to wear the fine linen of outworked righteousness in your acts. The fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. It's not just imputed righteousness, it's righteousness lived out in acts. And that is what the bride is going to wear. So you really need to check on whether you're weaving your linen.

We're going back to Exodus 28 and just briefly recapitulate the materials: gold for divinity and holiness, blue for the heavenly, purple for royalty and suffering, scarlet for blood and humanity, fine linen for purity or righteousness worked out in deeds.

Now we come to the first and the most distinctive priestly garment which is the ephod. Verse 6:

> "They shall also make the ephod of gold, of blue and purple and scarlet material and fine twisted linen, the work of the skillful workman."

All the five materials are in the ephod. The ephod was the one garment that specifically was worn only by priests. It reached from the breast down to the hips and it was held in place by two shoulder bands which went over each shoulder. And you'll see in this particular case on each of the shoulder bands there was something very important attached. And the attachment held the shoulder bands together.

Let me say right from the beginning, one of the emphases of this passage is that everything is held together, everything is part of a whole and nothing can be omitted. All the qualifications have to be there.

The ephod was also tied around the waist with a sash which indicates that it had to be closely attached to the priest's body. It was not to hang loosely, it was to be very closely a part of him. I trust that makes the picture plain. I'm going to go on reading verse by verse.

> "It shall have two shoulder pieces joined to its two ends, that it may be joined."

The key word there is joined. Everything has to be a single whole. Verse 8, we come to the waistband.

> "And the skillfully woven band, which is on it, shall be like its workmanship, of the same material ..."

Or from it. In other words, I understand it to be attached to it. It was not separate.

> "... of gold, of blue and purple and scarlet material and fine twisted [or woven] linen."

I don't know how it is with you, but for me as I go through that list and repeat it every time, somehow it forms a picture inside me of beauty, of skilled craftsmanship and of rich meaning. I just hope the Holy Spirit can communicate to you what I see in it. Because to me, it is so rich I could dwell on this chapter for hours.

Verses 9–12, the first use of the names of the tribes.

> "And you shall take two onyx stones and engrave on them the names of the sons of Israel, six of their names on the one stone, and the names of the remaining six on the other stone, according to their birth. As a jeweler engraves a signet, you shall engrave the two stones according to the names of the sons of Israel; you shall set them in filigree settings of gold."

Now, consider where these two jewels were with the names on them. They were on the shoulder pieces holding the straps together so that every time the priest went into the tabernacle he lifted up the names of the twelve sons of Israel to God. God looked down upon the priest and saw the names. His presence was a continual reminder of those twelve sons of Jacob.

And secondly, the shoulder in the Bible is the place of strength. There are two areas of strength: the loin, or the thigh, and the shoulder. So the high priest always bore the names of God's people before God individually on his shoulder, as it were, supported by his strength. There are two passages about the shoulder that I like. Keep your finger again in Exodus 28 and turn to Isaiah 9:6 for a moment.

> "For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; the government will rest on His shoulders."

That's the place of rule, authority and power. Then in the story of the lost sheep in Luke 15:5, what is for me a very beautiful touch when you consider who the shepherd is. He goes out after this sheep that is lost in the desert, verse 5:

> "When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing."

He gives it his total support and complete security.

But in the passage we're looking at, it's on the shoulders that the names of God's people are lifted up before God.

Going back now to Exodus 28:13–14.

> "And you shall make filigree settings of gold, and two chains of pure gold; you shall make them of twisted cordage work, and you shall put the corded chains on the filigree settings."

So the twisted chains again speak of something that's been worked out and has great strength. And the gold again speaks of something that's divine, something that man cannot tamper with. It's settled. And it fastens the names of the people of God to the high priest's ephod. In other words, to be high priest you always had to bear the names of God's people upon you.

I don't know whether that speaks to you at all in a way of what intercessory prayer is. I imagine there are parents here who can understand what it means to bear the names of your children on your shoulders before God. I've discovered it's quite a responsibility being a parent. How many of you have made that discovery? I've also discovered that when my children get married, my responsibilities don't terminate! I still have their names on my shoulders. As a matter of fact, since I married Ruth I have exactly the same number of names that the high priest had, but they're not all boys.

All right. Going back to that passage in my outline at the bottom of Page 2/4. The two identical stones indicate corporate identity. Six on one, six on the other. And notice it was the ephod that held them together. And it's only our high priest that holds us together. How many of you would agree with that?

We've looked at the gold settings and chains. My comment is divine, inseparable. I hope I'm bringing it out to you that everything had to be there attached, nothing could be loose, nothing could be hanging around, nothing could be missing. It had to be totally, perfectly complete.

Verses 15–21, the breastpiece. Let's read those verses.

> "You shall make a breastpiece [or a pouch] of judgment."

Now the NIV says "of making decisions." And we'll come to the meaning of that in a few moments.

Let's just go on for a moment.

> "You shall make a breastpiece of judgment, the work of a skillful workman; like the work of the ephod you shall make it: of gold, of blue and purple and scarlet material and fine twisted linen you shall make it."

Again, all the same materials.

> "It shall be square and folded double, a span in length and a span in width."

I take it myself that it was a span folded. A span is approximately nine inches but it's a measurement from the tip of your thumb to the tip of your little finger stretched out. All the measurements of the Bible basically are taken from the human body. An inch is the top joint of your thumb, a foot is a foot, span is a span, a cubit is the lower part of your arm from the elbow to the tip of your fingers. When it says in Revelation that the cubit was the measurement of a man, that is, of the angel, there's more point to that than you see at first because it somehow indicates that the angel had approximately the same measurements as a man. All right, going on, verse 17:

> "And you shall mount on it four rows of stones; the first row shall be a row of ruby, topaz and emerald..."

Not all these stones are certainly identified.

> "... the second row a turquoise, a sapphire and a diamond; and the third row a jacinth, an agate and an amethyst; and the fourth

> row a beryl and an onyx and a jasper; they shall be set in gold filigree. And the stones shall be according to the names of the sons of Israel: twelve, according to their names; they shall be like the engravings of a seal, each according to his name for the twelve tribes."

It's a very beautiful picture. Not only did the priest carry the names on his shoulder but he carried them over his heart. His strength and his love were totally committed to the people he represented.

Here we get individuality. Whereas on the shoulder there was six names on one stone, six on the other, here there's one stone for each name. And each name has got its own particular stone. So God caters not merely for corporate identity but also for individuality. I think it's important to see that. But individuality proceeds out of corporate identity.

Just as an example I'd like you to turn for a moment to Ephesians 4:4–7. Verses 4–6 establish unity of the body of Christ, the seven basic unities.

> "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all."

That's the basic unity. But then it goes on:

> "But to each of us grace was given according to the [specific individual] measure of Christ's gift."

So out of unity God brings forth individuality. But if we go the other way we will never out of individuality achieve unity. We have to start from unity and flow forth to individuality.

All right. Going on to verses 22–28:

> "And you shall make on the breastpiece chains of twisted cordage work in pure gold. And you shall make on the breastpiece two rings of gold, and shall put the two rings on the two ends of the breastpiece. And you shall put the two cords of gold on the two rings at the ends of the breastpiece. And you shall put the other two ends of the two cords on the two filigree settings, and put them on the shoulder pieces of the ephod, at the front of it. And you shall make two rings of gold and shall place them on the two ends of the breastpiece, on the edge of it, which is toward the inner side of the ephod. And you shall make two rings of gold and put them on the bottom of the two shoulder pieces of the ephod, on the front of it close to the place where it is joined, above the skillfully woven band of the ephod. And they shall bind the breastpiece by its rings to the rings of the ephod with a blue cord, that it may be on the skillfully woven band of the ephod, and that the breastpiece may not come loose from the ephod."

In other words, when the priest's body moved it wouldn't hang out or shake because it was tied top and bottom with gold rings fastened with blue cords. And at the top it was also fastened to the shoulder pieces on the ephod so that the whole thing again was totally united. And to me the cords of blue speak of that which is joined in heaven and nothing on earth can separate so that no matter what takes place on earth, our high priest always carries our names on his shoulders and over his heart he has each of us individually on his heart. And as long as he wears the ephod, the names must be there, bound with blue cords.

In other words, the picture of the high priest is one totally committed to the welfare of God's people.

Totally committed to represent them faithfully before God.

We'll go on just a little longer. We go to verses 29–30. Here is where we have something that takes a little explaining.

> "And Aaron shall carry the names of the sons of Israel in the breastpiece of judgment over his heart when he enters the holy place, for a memorial before the LORD continually."

That's intercession. It's continual lifting up of the names of God's people.

Ruth and I maintain a prayer list of things we pray for and in one section which I won't reveal which section it is, we just have a list of names. And every time we get to that part of the prayer list we just read those names off before the Lord. Sometime back, maybe a couple of years ago, we both felt prompted to put on it the name of a certain preacher who wasn't very close and was in some ways rather critical, I felt, of myself. We just mentioned his name, we didn't pray any long prayers, we didn't tell God what to do. Within about eighteen months he had been brought to us in a most remarkable way, expressed his admiration and loyalty to me and been brought into a very close relationship. The only factor in that that we could find to explain it was simply that every time we read this list we mentioned his name before the Lord. We need to go back to verses 28 and 30. I'll read them once more. Exodus 28–30:

> "And Aaron shall carry the names of the sons of Israel in the breastpiece of judgment over his heart when he enters the holy place, for a memorial before the LORD continually. And you shall put in the breastpiece of judgment the Urim and Thummim, and they shall be over Aaron's heart when he goes in before the LORD; and Aaron shall carry the judgment of the sons of Israel over his heart before the LORD continually."

We need to say a little bit about those two Hebrew words Urim and Thummim, which are normally translated "light and perfection." And the New International Version, as I said, translates it "a breastpiece for making decisions," which brings out the point that these two, whatever they were, in the breastpiece were used somehow to discern God's decisions in certain matters for the children of Israel. Traditionally, it's been held that they were two stones, some kind of precious stones, and that in certain circumstances when God wished to communicate His decision to the people of Israel through the high priest, one or other of the stones would become supernaturally illuminated. And according to which stone it was, that would indicate basically whether it was yes or no.

Another theory which sounds improbable to me is that they were just two stones inside the pouch and that they cast lots with them by using them more or less like dice. I doubt whether that's what was intended because it seems to me it's on a supernatural level. However, there's nobody, I think, who knows absolutely for sure just how it functioned.

Now, we could look for a moment at some examples of the use of Urim and Thummim in the Scriptures. The references are given there in your note outlines. We'll turn, first of all, to Numbers 27:21. Speaking about Joshua who was to take over from Moses as leader of the children of Israel, the Lord said:

> "Moreover, he [that's Joshua] shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall inquire for him by the judgment of the Urim before the LORD. At his command they shall go out and at his command they shall come in."

It seems to place Joshua on a slightly different level from Moses. Moses heard direct from the Lord, communicated with the Lord face to face. But Joshua was to get some of his communication at least from the Lord through the high priest by these two stones. And when he wanted a decision, "Shall we go out?" "Shall we come in?" he would go to the high priest. The high priest would pray or do whatever and the stone would give the answer. That much I think is clear.

Let's look also in Deuteronomy 33:8–10. This is the blessings of the twelve tribes. This is the blessing of Levi, the priestly tribe.

> "And of Levi he said, 'Let Thy Thummim and Thy Urim belong to Thy godly man [that's Levi], whom Thou didst prove at Massah, with whom Thou didst contend at the waters of Meribah; who said of his father and his mother, 'I did not consider them'; and he did not acknowledge his brothers, nor did he regard his own sons, for they observed Thy word, and kept Thy covenant. They shall teach Thine ordinances to Jacob, and Thy law to Israel. They shall put incense before Thee, and whole burnt offerings on Thine altar.'"

Those are the priestly functions. But included in the priestly functions was the exercise, or shall we say discernment, by

Urim and Thummim.

And then there's a clear example in the experience of David in 1 Samuel 23. David was now a fugitive, and King Saul was seeking to capture him and kill him. And this is an incident here, verses 6– 12:

> "Now it came about, when Abiathar the son of Ahimelech fled to David at Keilah, that he came down with an ephod in his hand."

He was the son of the high priest that had been murdered by King Saul. And he came as a priest with his distinctly priestly garment, the ephod.

> "When it was told Saul that David had come to Keilah, Saul said, 'God has delivered him into my hand, for he shut himself in by entering a city with double gates and bars.'"

I just want to note in passing that when a man is deceived he can be very deceived. Saul was preparing to murder David and he actually attributed the opportunity to God. But I have found out that when religious people get really deceived they usually blame their deceptions on God. So he said, "God has delivered him into my hand." That's just by the way.

> "So Saul summoned all the people for war, to go down to Keilah to besiege David and his men. Now David knew that Saul was plotting evil against him; so he said to Abiathar the priest, 'Bring the ephod here.' Then David said, 'O LORD God of Israel, Thy servant has heard for certain that Saul is seeking to come to Keilah to destroy the city on my account. Will the men of Keilah surrender me into his hand? Will Saul come down just as Thy servant has heard? O LORD God of Israel, I pray, tell Thy servant.' And the LORD said, 'He will come down.'"

And the answer to the questions was yes.

> "Then David said, 'Will the men of Keilah surrender me and my men into the hand of Saul?' And the LORD said, 'They will surrender you.'"

In other words, the answer was yes. From the context it appears that David got those answers from Abiathar through the use of the ephod. We notice it was a simple yes or no answer like some of the tests that they give you nowadays when they want you to renew your driver's license. You either put yes or no or something like that. Well, apparently that was the extent of the communication that came through the Urim and the Thummim.

We'll look at a couple of other places, then I'll offer one comment on that. The other two passages are exactly identical, they're just a repetition. We'll look at Ezra 2:61–63.

> "And the sons of the priests: [This is a genealogical list of the Israelites who return from Babylon:] the sons of Habaiah, the sons of Hakkoz, the sons of Barzillai, who took a wife from the daughters of Barzillai the Gileadite, and he was called by their name. These searched among their ancestral registration, but they could not be located ..."

They could not prove from their genealogy that they were descendants of Levi.

> "... they were considered unclean [ceremonially unclean] and were excluded from the priesthood. And the governor [that was Nehemiah] said to them that they should not eat from the most holy things until a priest stood up with Urim and Thummin."

In other words, when the priest came who could exercise Urim and Thummin, then he would give them an answer were they truly descendants of Levi or not.

Now we never read anywhere in the Bible from that time onwards that such a priest did arrive, which leaves open a number of interesting possibilities. I think many people of Jewish descent today don't know what tribe they belong to, but ultimately, if I understand the prophecies of the Old Testament correctly, it's going to make a difference. And so we're going to have to have a priest who exercises the ability to determine which tribe. I believe the ultimate priest

will be Jesus. When He comes He'll sort people out by their tribes and other categories as needed.

But meanwhile because they couldn't get a specific clear answer from God, they simply said, "We can't include you as priests, you can't prove your genealogy."

An interesting sideline on the importance of genealogy. Historically, when the temple was destroyed in 70 AD by the Romans, as far as I know, basically almost all the authorized extant genealogies were destroyed with the temple. This has got one interesting consequence because a Messiah has to prove He is descended from David and from the time of 70 AD onwards, the evidence to prove it is no longer in existence. So it would be very difficult for anyone subsequent to that period to justify his claim to be the Messiah. Whereas no one questioned the claim of Jesus because everybody knew where He belonged. His parents had to go back to the city of David to register because He was of the lineage of David. That's just a sideline.

Let's go back to Exodus 28:29–30 and let me just offer a kind of—what would I say—a spiritual comment on this. I suppose most of us are familiar with what we would call the "witness of the Holy Spirit." I think that's a little bit like the Urim and Thummim. Sometimes He says no, sometimes He says yes. And I think when we pray for people and bear their names on our hearts we should have an Urim and a Thummin at work in here. When somebody you're praying for is going wrong, let's say, the red light flashes. When they're taking the right course it's the green light that comes up. That's just a little prosaic illustration. But all these things in the high priest's garment have something that corresponds in our spiritual experience.

We're going on now, verse 31–32:

> "And you shall make the robe of the ephod all of blue. And there shall be an opening at its top in the middle of it; around its opening there shall be a binding of woven work, as it were the opening of a coat of mail, that it may not be torn."

A "robe of blue" speaks of a heavenly ministry. If you want to turn, keep your finger there and turn to Hebrews 9:24 for a moment.

> "For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us..."

His high priestly ministry is on the heavenly plane.

And then going back to Exodus 28, it had a woven collar. Presumably it was put on over the head. It was probably a complete garment all the way around but it the collar was woven so that when the priest put it on it would never be torn. Again you see the same emphasis; everything has to be complete and entire, there's no way that it could be spoiled.

Verse 33–34. We come now to the things that were put on the robe.

> "And you shall make on its hem pomegranates of blue and purple and scarlet material, all around on its hem, and bells of gold between them all around; [and then they alternated] a golden bell and a pomegranate, a golden bell and a pomegranate, all around on the hem of the robe."

We notice that in the materials of the pomegranates we have again the three colors: blue, purple, scarlet; the heavenly and the human combined. The pomegranate, I think, speaks of fruit and the bells of confession. So the lesson is, Don't have a bell if you don't have a pomegranate. You just can't go around tinkling unless you can produce the fruit.

Also, the bell spoke of holiness and the ordinance was that he had to keep the bell tinkling all the time while he moved about his duties inside the tabernacle. And if he didn't, he would die—which is a tremendously solemn warning that God demands continual holiness. There's got to be the continual testimony of holiness sounding off from the bell at the bottom of our robes. Every move we make has got to be made in holiness. That's the standard for the priest.

The combination of the scarlet and the blue making purple, we could look for one Scripture in 1 Timothy 2:5:

> "For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."

This, of course, was written a number of years after the death and resurrection of Jesus, but He's still called "the

man." So He retained the scarlet, if I may put it that way. That's a very, very remarkable fact. I don't know whether you've ever pondered that when Jesus became man it wasn't for thirty-three years. It was forever. There isn't a more astonishing fact I think in the Bible than that there's a man at God's right hand on the throne of all authority. He's God—please understand me aright. He never ceased to be God but He became man and, having become man, He is man forever. He's the head of a new race, the God/man race, the Emmanuel race. The color is purple, it combines the blue and the scarlet and it's ordained to rule forever. Those who are born again through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are born into that kingly race. We are kings and priests.

Let's go back to Exodus 28:35. We've really looked at that, but let me read it.

> "It shall be on Aaron [that's the robe] when he ministers; and its tinkling may be heard when he enters and leaves the holy place before the LORD, that he may not die."

Notice, if there were one moment without holiness it would cost him his life. One of the things this impresses on us is that God demands absolute holiness in those who approach.

Now we come to verses 36–37, the plate.

> "You shall also make a plate of pure gold and shall engrave on it, like the engravings of a seal, 'Holy to the LORD.' And you shall fasten it on a blue cord, and it shall be on the turban; and it shall be at the front of the turban."

So every time the priest went in and God looked upon him from above, the first thing He saw was this gold plate on his turban declaring "holiness to the Lord." Again, the emphasis on holiness tied there by a blue cord: something established in heaven earth cannot change or affect. Verse 38, and this is a very important verse:

> "And it [that is, the gold plate] shall be on Aaron's forehead, and Aaron shall take away [but the other translation says bear] the iniquity of the holy things which the sons of Israel consecrate, with regard to all their holy gifts; and it shall always be on his forehead, that they may be accepted before the LORD."

I want to read the NIV there because it's much clearer. That's Exodus 28:38.

> "It [that's the plate] will be on Aaron's forehead, and he will bear the guilt involved in the sacred gifts the Israelites consecrate."

That's a profound statement, that every time we offer anything to God, if there's any guilt in us it has to be dealt with. God cannot accept anything guilty. But, it's borne not by us but by our high priest and he can bear it because he himself is totally holy. Let me read that further.

> "It will be on Aaron's forehead continually, so that they [that's the gifts of the children of Israel] will be acceptable to the LORD."

I think this brings out as clearly as anything does why we have a high priest. Because there must be somebody to bear the guilt involved in our lives and associated with our offerings. And the point that I wish to emphasize is this: The offerings of the Israelites were not accepted because of them, they were accepted because of the holiness of their high priest. And the same is true, of course, much more profoundly true, with us. Our gifts are accepted not because of us but because of the holiness of our high priest. I trust you can see this point—that without a high priest we would have no access to God, we would have no relationship whatever with God. It entirely depends on our high priest.

Going on to verse 39:

> "And you shall weave the tunic of checkered work of fine linen, and shall make a turban of fine linen, and you shall make a sash, the work of a weaver."

Notice that the tunic, which was the undergarment, which wasn't visible, was of fine linen. The basis of everything is total purity and righteousness, even if it is invisible. So underneath everything was purity and on the turban above everything was holiness. And the sash held it all together.

Again, I trust you see the tremendous emphasis on total purity and holiness. Notice, it was a woven tunic, it was not imputed righteousness, but it was outworked righteousness. It was the righteousness of a spotless, faultless, sinless life.

Verse 40:

> "And for Aaron's sons you shall make tunics; you shall also make sashes for them, and you shall make caps for them, for glory and for beauty."

But there were certain things that the other sons did not have. They did not have a breastpiece, an ephod or a turban. Those were exclusively for the high priest.

Now verse 41 is a very full verse.

> "And you shall put them on Aaron your brother and on his sons with him; and you shall anoint them and ordain them and consecrate them ..."

There are four successive steps. First of all, you put the clothes on. That's the personal qualifications. Secondly, you anoint them. That's the supernatural grace.

Third, you ordain. But where it says ordain in English, the Hebrew says "you will fill their hands." And when they were ordained, they appeared with sacrifices on their hands which they lifted up before the Lord. That was the ceremony of ordaining. So that is the equipment of service.

And finally, they were consecrated; they were set apart to their office.

Let's just go through those four stages again. First, their clothes were their personal qualifications. Secondly, the anointing was the supernatural grace that came upon them. Third, the ordaining or the filling of their hands was their equipment for their task. And fourthly, finally, they were consecrated, they were set apart to their task.

Now I believe everybody who is called to serve the Lord ultimately should have something in his life that corresponds to those four phases. There are the personal qualifications, the supernatural anointing, the equipment for the task and being set apart.

While I was in Mobile recently with my brothers—Jim was one of them—I asked them to pray over me and set me apart for the ministry of Jerusalem. I felt somehow I would be better qualified if I had been officially set apart by my brothers. It was a very powerful experience for me. I felt it was like the last stage of the process which hadn't previously really been carried out the way God wished it.

I want to suggest to you if you're in the Lord's service or you may be in the Lord's service, it would be well for you to consider these four phases and consider where you are. One of the things that comes out of this study of the priest's garments, and of the whole tabernacle, is God knows exactly the way He wants things. He really doesn't offer us any alternatives. All the measurements, all the materials, all the instructions were exact. I don't believe God has changed. I think we—especially we Americans—are very sloppy. We tend to think it doesn't matter much if I do it this way or that way. I don't think that's what God would be saying. I really believe one of the challenges of this teaching is to line our lives up much more accurately with the requirements of God.

Now, the requirements are not outward dress, they're not materials; they're more important and in my opinion, they're more specific. So you can either view this study as an interesting relic from a past culture or you can let it be something really soul-searching in your life. How am I measuring up to God's unvarying requirements? I think we would save ourselves a lot of problems if we would see that God is still just as exact and just as unvarying in His requirements as He ever was.

Let's go back and on to finish the chapter. There's just one more particularly vivid thing. Verses 42–43:

> "And you shall make for them linen breeches to cover their bare flesh; they shall reach from the loins even to the thighs [the NIV says from the waist to the thighs]. And they shall be on Aaron and on his sons when they enter the tent of meeting, or when they approach the altar to minister in the holy place, so that they do not incur guilt and die. It shall be a statute forever to him and to his descendants after him."

Again, the linen speaks of what? Purity. The area in which it was to be worn emphasizes sexual purity. The interesting thing is that nobody ever knew whether the priests were wearing those britches except who? God and the man. And I want to say to you there are areas in your life where you

and God are the only one that knows. But remember, God does know. God knows, my dear brother, whether you've got your britches on. The pastor is not going to come up to you and ask you. The Holy Spirit already knows."

Now, just one other point. We're going to turn on to Exodus 30 for a moment. I'd like to go through 29 but it's taken us much longer than I intended to get through 28 so where would we ever be if we tried to do 29 also!

Now, beginning chapter 30 you get something very, very important. We'll read probably only the first verse.

> "Moreover, you shall make an altar as a place for burning incense; you shall make it of acacia wood."

It was to be overlaid with gold. What does incense represent in our lives? One word and only one word allowed. Worship. The wise men brought gold, incense and myrrh. I'm sure you know that gold is recognition of His divinity, incense is worship, the myrrh is the purple robe of suffering. Myrrh is always suffering in the Bible. So here we have the golden altar of incense. The gold speaks of total purity and it speaks of worship. The point I want to bring out is till we have a priest, we can't have an incense altar. So the order is very, very important.

Again, what's the lesson? No priest, no worship. Your worship has to go by way of your priest. If the priest isn't in order it's no good having an altar.

There's a very interesting passage in Revelations which seems to relate to this. Revelation 8:1–4. This is the opening of the seven seals of the scroll that is the kind of background of Revelation.

> "When He broke the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour."

It's very interesting to consider what heaven was silent about. I believe that this passage really gives us the answer.

> "And I saw the seven angels who stand before God; and seven trumpets were given to them. And another angel came and stood at the altar, holding a golden censer ..."

What goes in a censer? Incense. And what does incense speak of? Worship.

> "... and much incense was given to him, that he might add it to the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne."

So here's a picture of the prayers of God's people rising up before God and His throne. And they're pictured like the beautiful, white, aromatic smoke arising from the incense on the golden altar. And there had to be much incense. There had to be a great deal of worship. Verse 4:

> "And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up before God out of the angel's hand."

Because the angel had the coals and the incense in the censer. How many of you have seen in a church where they use incense? They have it on a brass chain and they swing it. And as they swing it, the breeze sets the coals burning and the smoke rises, which is an Old Testament pattern.

All right. Verse 5:

> "And the angel took the censer; and he filled it with the fire of the altar and threw it to the earth; and there followed peals of thunder and sounds and flashes of lightning and an earthquake."

Now, this is just "the Prince version," nobody has to accept it. But I believe heaven was silent because they were waiting for the prayers of God's people to come up from earth. It blesses me that heaven falls silent when earth prays. The prayers had to be offered by this angel, who I believe is either Jesus or a type of Jesus, before they could be accepted. They had to receive incense from his hand. But, when the prayers went up the angel took the coals from off the altar and from the censer and threw them down on the earth and earth was in an uproar.

One of the things that has been impressed on me is when we pray it sets earth in an uproar. If you look at the Middle East today, I would like to say that I think it's partly caused by the prayers of God's people. The prayers went up, the incense was added, the angel took the coals and threw them down and there isn't much tranquility anywhere in the Middle East. It's lightnings, thunders, flashes and disturbances. And I don't expect it to get any more tranquil. In fact, if my prayers have got anything to do with it, it

won't! I have to tell you honestly I do think they've got something to do with it. After all, you've either got to believe God answers prayer or He doesn't. There's really no middle ground. So if He doesn't answer prayer, don't pray. And if He does answer prayer, then expect something to happen. I'm in the latter category. I expect things to happen when I pray. I don't think that's arrogant; I think it's just faith.

Let's go into chapter 3. I'm sure some of you are wondering when we're going to finish. I would like to tell you I am too! I really thought we'd get through Exodus 28 in the first session but it didn't work out that way.

Turning now to Hebrews 3, and we're still on the theme of the high priest. We'll take the first verse, which is a very rich verse.

> "Wherefore, holy brothers ..."

I don't know whether it's naughty of me or not, but I get so tired with the New American Standard saying "brethren." I mean, most of the rest of the words are modern. Who says, "I've got six brethren"? I mean, nobody ever says that. It's just unreal. There's other good things in it, but from time to time I just have to put it down, it makes me so disturbed.

There we are. Hebrews 3:1.

> "Wherefore, holy brothers, partakers of a heavenly calling, focus upon ..."

I think that's the best translation I could find. It says "consider," but that's a weak word. This is a very strong word, it means "fasten your attention upon."

> "... the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Jesus."

Let's look now at the outline and just pick up the points there. We are to focus on Jesus in two capacities. First, apostle. Second, High Priest. The word apostle means "somebody sent forth." In John 13 Jesus said, "The one who is sent is not greater than the one who sent him." But the Greek word is apostle. So whenever you meet the word apostle, immediately put your mind in gear to think "sent," because if somebody isn't sent, he's not an apostle. If you meet some apostles, you wouldn't need to ask who sent them. It's a very important issue.

Jesus was the apostle because the Father sent Him forth. In John 10:35:

> "Say ye of Him whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world."

And later when He appeared to His disciples after the resurrection He said, "As My Father has sent Me, I send you." So Jesus became an apostle when the Father sent Him. His disciples became apostles when He sent them. But without being sent, a person is not an apostle.

Jesus was sent to do something no one else could do, to deal with the sin issue. He did that through His life and death and the sacrifice of Himself on the cross. In that sense He was the apostle.

Having finished the task, He went back to the Father to represent those who had received His redemptive work. Going back to represent us, He became our high priest. So He is, first, the apostle, second, the high priest.

Here we have in this verse the first occurrence of the word confession. You remember that's one of the key words we're following through. The Greek, homologia, from which —let's not get involved in that—which means literally "saying the same as." If you want to know what confession is, that's what it is. Confession comes from a Latin verb, which means precisely the same, "to say the same as." So confession basically is saying the same as. What it means is that you say the same as God says. It makes your words agree with God's words.

Jesus is the High Priest of our confession. It's very, very important because it means that if there's no confession, there's no High Priest. His functioning on our behalf as High Priest is only released by our confession. If we don't say the same with our mouths as the Bible says about ourselves and Him, then we have no High Priest.

And you'll find that all through this confession is linked with high priesthood. Let me just give you two other passages. Keep your finger there in Hebrews 3 and turn to Hebrews 4:14.

> "Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us [do what?] hold fast our confession."

And then in Hebrews 10:21–23 [leaving out verse 22]:

> "... since we have a great [high] priest over the house of God, let us [do what?] ... hold

> fast the confession of our hope without wavering."

There's a progression and it tells us a lot. First, make the confession. Second, hold it fast. And then, hold it fast without wavering. What does that tell you? It's not going to get any easier. It's not difficult to say it the first time, it's pretty hard to say it the third time.

"I believe the Lord is my healer." That sounds good in the meeting. But then when you get alone and you've got nobody else to pray with you, it's dark and you've got five different kinds of pain in different areas of your body, then you have to hold it fast, how? Without wavering, that's right. So those three passages tell you a whole lot. You say, "It's easy just to keep saying the same thing." You try. You try and come back and tell me in a year's time if it's that easy. No wonder the devil stands in front of our mouths and tries to stop us from saying it. Why? Because if we don't say it, we really tie the hands of our high priest. He's the high priest of our confession.

You're not invited to say anything you think, you're invited to say what the Bible says. You make your words agree with the Word of God.

We have just a few more things to look at and we will close. Going back to our outline and to Hebrews 3:1, it says:

> "Holy brothers, fix your attention on Jesus."

The key to holiness is focusing on Jesus. The moment we take our eyes off Jesus, holiness becomes a problem.

And then notice we're partakers of a heavenly or a heavenward calling. The whole thrust of Hebrews is upward and forward all the way through. That's why it's so good for you and me right now, because many of us need to be spurred forward and upward. Compare one beautiful passage in Philippians 3:14, Paul's personal testimony:

> "I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."

Paul had that vision of an upward call and he was never satisfied to stay on the same level. Going back to your outline one more moment. Hebrews 3:2:

> "He was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also was in all his house."

This is the first occurrence of the word faithful linked with the word faith. Altogether they occur 38 times in this epistle. I want to point out to you, and this is my closing remark today, that the first use of the word in Hebrews is the basic use of the word in the Bible. It's not talking about what we believe, it's talking about our character. It's talking about somebody committed.

Evangelical Christianity has completely misrepresented what faith is. We tend to talk in terms of doctrine, holding certain theology. That's not where it's at. Faith is primarily loyalty. It's primarily commitment—personal commitment to a person. You look at this passage, it wasn't a question of what Moses believed, it was a question of the way he acted. He was committed to God no matter what anybody else did. Moses stuck with it, he had his job and he carried it out.

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Sermon

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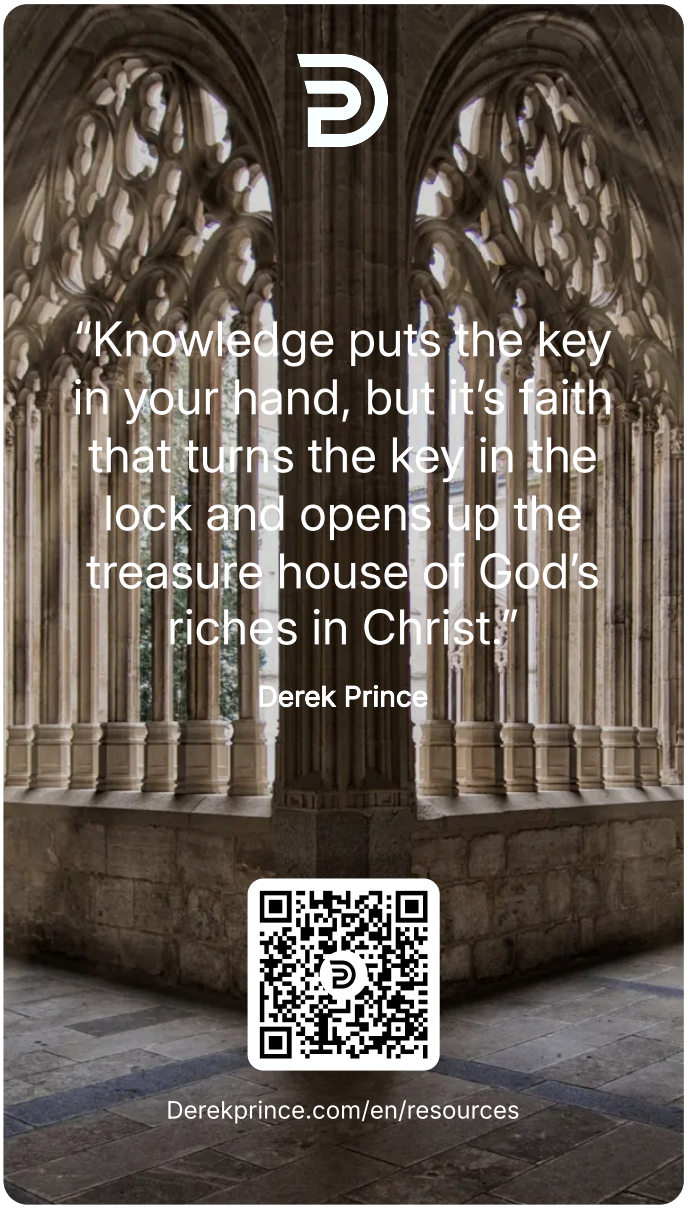

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