

Exodus 28:1–43 and 39:1-31

Introduction

Remember our key verse for this entire last section of Exodus:

- Exodus 25:8 — [The Lord said to Moses,] let [the people] make me a sanctuary [a sacred space], that I may dwell in their midst.

And yet what's the good of a sacred space for Yahweh in the midst of Israel if no one is allowed to enter that space? More specifically, what's the good of Yahweh's tent in the midst of Israel if no one is allowed to enter even His *guestroom*? It's *this* problem that our chapter this morning on **clothes** is meant to answer.

Remember the screens and the veil marking the entrances into Yahweh's outer court, then Yahweh's guest room, and finally Yahweh's throne room. (cf. Exod. 27:16; 26:36; 26:31) Remember that on the one hand, the screens and the veil are marks of **separation**. They're warnings to all who are unauthorized to "keep out." On the other hand, the screens and the veil are also the sign of *entrances* – entrances leading one after the other, after the other to the very heart of Yahweh's presence. So we feel this massive tension between "Keep out" and "Welcome!" The question, then, is **who** can go in, and **when**, and **how**? The "who" is answered right away, in the first verse of chapter twenty-eight:

I. Exodus 28:1 — Then bring near to you Aaron your brother, and his sons with him, from among the people of Israel, to serve me as priests—Aaron and Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar.

Who can go in? God is explicit: "Aaron and Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar." That's *who*. Who can go in? Any man biologically descended from *Aaron*, the brother of Moses. That's *who*.

The privilege of entrance *beyond* the screen of the tabernacle, and even *beyond* the veil of the most holy place, was not earned, or merited, and it couldn't ever be bought, or given away. It was simply *inherited*, passed down from generation to generation of Aaron's family – from father to son, and from that son to his son after him, "forever" (for as long as the tabernacle/temple stood and the covenant was in effect). The privilege of entrance into God's tent was reserved simply for those whom God had chosen according to the good pleasure of His will.

Only those specifically chosen and set apart by God could ever enter the tabernacle and come back out alive. And yet just being a son of Aaron, or even Aaron himself, still isn't enough to provide **safe** entrance into Yahweh's royal tent. After all, the whole point of God's choice is that you don't deserve this entrance any more than the next family in Israel. So now that the "*who*" has been answered, the question still remaining to be answered is "*how*." Now that God has chosen the family of Aaron to be the ones who are granted entrance into His royal tent, we still have to ask: "*How* are they to enter **safely**?"

II. Exodus 28:2–5 — And you shall make **holy garments** for Aaron your brother, **for glory and for beauty**. You shall speak to **all the skillful, whom I have filled with a spirit of skill**, that they make Aaron’s garments **to consecrate him for my priesthood**. These are the garments that they shall make: a **BREASTPIECE**, an **EPHOD**, a **ROBE**, a **TUNIC** of checker work, a **TURBAN**, and a **SASH**. They shall make **holy garments** for Aaron your brother and his sons **to serve me as priests**. **They shall receive gold, blue and purple and scarlet yarns, and fine twined linen**.

Obviously, these clothes are a really, *really* **big deal**. Notice how they’re described: They are to be “holy garments... for glory and for beauty.” Notice who is to make them: Only “all the skillful/wise, whom [Yahweh has] filled with a spirit of skill/wisdom.” Notice how many different pieces of clothing there are: “These are the garments that they shall make: a breastpiece, an ephod, a robe, a tunic of checker work, a turban, and a sash,” not even mentioning, yet, the linen undergarments. Notice the specific materials that were to be donated for making the clothes: “Gold, blue and purple and scarlet yarns, and fine twined linen.” And finally, notice the purpose of all these articles of clothing: “[They are to] make Aaron’s garments **to consecrate him for my priesthood**... they shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother and his sons **to serve me as priests**.” The reason for these clothes is to enable Aaron and his sons to *appropriately* and *safely* serve in Yahweh’s royal presence.

Clearly, these garments are a really, *really* big deal! But as if this *weren’t* already clear *enough*, it’s about to be made even more clear by the amount of space and detail that’s devoted to the description of each of these garments individually: the *description* of their glory and their beauty; their *description* as works of skill and wisdom; the *description* of the specific materials used for each article of clothing; and the vivid reminders of the purpose—and absolute necessity—of these garments.

III. Exodus 28:6–8 — And they shall make the **EPHOD** of **gold, of blue and purple and scarlet yarns, and of fine twined linen, skillfully worked**. It shall have two shoulder pieces attached to its two edges, so that it may be joined together. And the **skillfully woven** band on it shall be made like it and be of one piece with it, of **gold, blue and purple and scarlet yarns, and fine twined linen**.

[See Illustration on page 11]

Notice that this ephod is to be made out of the exact same materials as the inside of Yahweh’s royal tent. Should you have ever been granted access to the inside of the tabernacle, what would you have seen? **Gold, everywhere**. The ark of the covenant overlaid with gold, an atonement plate made of pure gold, two cherubim made of pure gold, a table overlaid with gold, with all its vessels made of pure gold, a lampstand made of pure gold with all its vessels made of pure gold, an altar of incense overlaid with gold, nine pillars overlaid with gold, fifty clasps made of gold, and the bars and the frames for the tabernacle all overlaid with gold. Except for the bases of the frames and pillars, and except for the curtains, *everything* inside of Yahweh’s tent was gold – there was gold everywhere you looked. And so, if Aaron would enter Yahweh’s tent *appropriately* and **safely**, then the ephod that he wears must *also* be made of gold (entwined with

gold thread; cf. 39:3). As the first material mentioned, it seems likely that gold might have been the most prominent and the most visible of all the materials in the ephod.

But *what else* would you have seen if you had been granted access to the inside of the tabernacle? **Fine twined linen and blue and purple and scarlet yarns, everywhere.** The walls, the ceiling, the screen, the veil— everything that wasn't gold was fine twined linen and blue and purple and scarlet yarns. If Aaron would enter Yahweh's tent *appropriately* and *safely*, then the ephod that he wears must *also* be made of the exact **same** materials. As if to make this connection even more explicit, we're told that the ephod is to be "skillfully worked" in the same way that the curtains and the veil of the tabernacle are also said to be "skillfully worked." (cf. Exod. 26:1, 31)

Finally, *everything* that's been said of the ephod is to apply *equally* to the belt of the ephod which is to be "made like [the ephod] and be of one piece with it."

IV. Exodus 28:15–16, 22–28 — You shall make a **BREASTPIECE** of judgment, **in skilled work. In the style of the ephod you shall make it—of gold, blue and purple and scarlet yarns, and fine twined linen shall you make it.** It shall be square and doubled, a span its length and a span its breadth... You shall make for the breastpiece **twisted chains like cords, of pure gold.** And you shall make for the breastpiece **two rings of gold**, and put the two rings on the two edges of the breastpiece. And you shall put the **two cords of gold** in the two rings at the edges of the breastpiece. The two ends of the two cords you shall attach to the two settings of filigree, and so attach it in front to the shoulder pieces of the ephod. You shall make **two rings of gold**, and put them at the two ends of the breastpiece, on its inside edge next to the ephod. And you shall make **two rings of gold**, and attach them in front to the lower part of the two shoulder pieces of the ephod, at its seam 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 **cord of blue**, so that it may lie on the **skillfully woven** band of the ephod, so that the breastpiece shall not come loose from the ephod.

[See Illustration on page 11]

What we see in these verses is that everything that applied to the ephod also applies to the breastpiece of judgment.¹ It's to be made of gold (entwined with gold thread), and of blue and purple and scarlet yarns, and fine twined linen. The corded chains and the four rings are also to be made of pure gold.

Notice that the cord that attaches the breastpiece to the rings of the ephod was to be blue ("a cord of blue"). This reminds us of the only other "look" that was visible from inside the tabernacle:

- **Exodus 26:4** — You shall make loops of **blue** on the edge of the outermost curtain in the first set. Likewise you shall make loops [of **blue**] on the edge of the outermost curtain in the second set.

¹ The ephod was described first because it's what the breastpiece was attached to. However, most often in the Bible, the ephod *assumes* the breastpiece (it's not necessary to mention both, because both are assumed *together*).

And finally, the breastpiece, like the ephod and like the tabernacle curtains and veil was to be the work *only* of the most skilled craftsman.

If the one whom God has chosen to enter His tent is to enter it *appropriately* and **safely**, then the part of his clothing that's *most* prominent and most visible (the ephod and the breastpiece) must reproduce perfectly and in every way, everything that one sees on the inside of Yahweh's tent.

V. Exodus 28:31–35 — You shall make the **ROBE** of the ephod **all of blue**. It shall have an opening for the head in the middle of it, with a woven binding around the opening, like the opening in a garment, so that it may not tear. On its hem you shall make pomegranates of **blue and purple and scarlet yarns**, around its hem, with **bells of gold** between them, a **golden bell** and a pomegranate, a **golden bell** and a pomegranate, around the hem of the robe. And it shall be on Aaron when he ministers, and its sound shall be heard when he goes into the Holy Place before the LORD, and when he comes out, **so that he does not die**.

[See Illustration on page 11]

As we move another layer closer to the high priest's body (another layer inward), we see a slight shift and change. The materials and colors are all still the same. There are still bells made of **gold**, and decorative pomegranates made of **blue and purple and scarlet yarns**, but these things are only found at the very bottom of the robe – at its hem. The robe itself, most of which will not be visible from the outside, is to be made all of blue.

So as we move inward to a less visible layer of clothing, and a layer closer to Aaron's body, we find a *very subtle diminishing* of "glory" and of "beauty." While the robe can still only be made by a skilled craftsman, it seems that it may not require quite the same level of skill as the ephod and the breastpiece.

And yet(!) for all this, the robe is still *no less essential* for the high priest to *appropriately* and *safely* enter Yahweh's royal tent. "It shall be on Aaron when he ministers, and its sound shall be heard when he goes into the Holy Place before the LORD, and when he comes out, **so that he does not die**." One commentator compares this to a "hiker's use of a 'bear bell' that he rings when he is in grizzly country lest he come upon and surprise one of those... bears, especially a mother with her cubs." (Eslinger, referenced in Hamilton; cf. Stuart) Of course, God is never taken by surprise and never needs to be "warned" that someone is entering His tent. The sound of the bells is not so much for God's "benefit" as it is for the priest's. I think the point is that the priest is to be constantly reminded that his steps are always watched, and his presence is always known, and therefore he should always be conducting himself accordingly – not with terror and paranoia, but certainly with a holy *fear* and *reverence*. The sound of the robe must always "be heard when [the high priest] goes into the Holy Place before the LORD, and when he comes out, **so that he does not die**."

VI. Exodus 28:36–37 — You shall make a **PLATE** of **pure gold** and engrave on it, like the engraving of a signet, 'Holy to the LORD.' And you shall fasten it on the turban by a cord of **blue**. It shall be on the front of the turban [of fine linen].

[See Illustration on page 11]

As with some parts of the ephod and the breastpiece, we'll also be coming back to this "headpiece" next week. But for right now, we notice again the plate made of **pure gold**, and the cord of **blue**.

VII. Exodus 28:39 — You shall weave the **TUNIC** in checker work of **fine linen**, and you shall make a **TURBAN** of **fine linen**, and you shall make a **SASH embroidered with needlework**.

[See Illustration on page 11]

After the ephod, and then the robe, we come now to a third layer of clothing – the layer that actually comes into direct **contact** with the priest's body. The tunic is not made of blue and purple and scarlet yarns, or embroidered in any way. It's a simpler garment – made "only" of an unadorned—though still checkered—"fine [twined] linen" (cf. 39:27-28) In the same way, the turban, which would also come into direct contact with the priest's head was also to be made "*simply*" of "fine [twined] linen" — while attached to it (*on the outside*; cf. Lev. 8:9) was the plate of gold fastened with the cord of blue. So, this layer of clothing touching the high priest's body reminds us of the curtains of the outer court of the tabernacle, marking the final boundary between the sacred and the profane. These curtains are also described simply as unadorned "fine twined linen." [See Illustration on page 12]

➤ Exodus 27:18 (cf. 27:9) — The length of the court shall be a hundred cubits, the breadth fifty, and the height five cubits, with hangings of **fine twined linen**.

And so we see again that as we move inward, either to less visible layers of clothing or to the layer of clothing that comes into direct contact with Aaron's body, there's a further diminishing of "glory" and of "beauty." Similar to the curtains of the outer court, the tunic provides a barrier between the body of the high priest, and the increasing "glory" and "beauty" of the outer layers. On the one hand, there's some practicality to this; but we should be seeing clearly that the point isn't just "practical."

The sash was a sort of "belt" around the tunic, but underneath the robe and the ephod. (cf. Lev. 8:7) It seems possible to me that the ends of the sash hung down *far enough* so as to be visible below the hem of the robe. One thing we know is that the sash was at least one layer removed from the body, and so in addition to being made "of fine twined linen and of blue and purple and scarlet yarns" (cf. 39:29) it's also the only part of the high priest's clothing to be described as "embroidered with needlework." The only other items also "embroidered with needlework" are the **screen** for the gate of the court (cf. Exod. 27:16) and the **screen** for the entrance of the tent. (cf. Exod. 26:36)

If the one whom God has chosen to enter His tent is to enter it *appropriately* and *safely*, then his clothing must reproduce not only everything that one sees on the inside of Yahweh's tent, but also the screens that mark the entrances leading into His presence.

VIII. Exodus 28:40–41 — For Aaron’s sons you shall make tunics and sashes and caps. **You shall make them for glory and beauty.** And you shall put them on Aaron your brother, and on his sons with him, and shall anoint them and ordain them and consecrate them, that they may serve me as priests.

The garments of the rest of the priests (other than the high priest) were more simple (just the tunic and the sash, and a cap), and yet even these were still made for “glory” and for “beauty.” But still, how could these chosen priests from the family of Aaron—clothed as simply as they were—how could they ever be allowed to enter even the “guest room” of Yahweh’s royal tent? Think, especially, about the fact that they wore no robe with bells on the hem so that its sound would be heard when they went into the Holy Place before the Lord, and when they came out, so that they would not die. (cf. 28:35) So, how is it that these priests could *possibly* enter Yahweh’s presence **safely**?” The answer seems to be that they were only, ever allowed to enter the tent in the company of the fully clothed high priest and always as his assistants. (cf. Stuart) Apart from the accompaniment of the high priest, I’m guessing that any other priest who dared to enter would likely not have come out alive.

If both the priests and the high priest wore tunics and sashes, there was also one other garment common to both.

IX. Exodus 28:42–43 — You shall make for them **linen UNDERGARMENTS** to cover their naked flesh. They shall reach from the hips to the thighs; and they shall be on Aaron and on his sons when they go into the tent of meeting or when they come near the altar to minister in the Holy Place, lest they bear guilt and die. This shall be a statute forever for him and for his offspring after him.

For the last time, we see that as we move inward, closer to the “naked flesh” of the priest’s body, there is a definite **diminishing** of “glory” and of “beauty.” While these linen undergarments can still only be made by a skilled craftsman, they certainly won’t require the same level of skill as the ephod and the breastpiece, or the robe, or likely even the checkered tunic.²

And yet(!) for all this, the linen undergarment is still *no less essential* for the high priest to *appropriately* and *safely* enter Yahweh’s royal tent. “They shall be on Aaron and on his sons when they go into the tent of meeting or when they come near the altar to minister in the Holy Place, **lest they bear guilt and die.**” Back in chapter twenty (20:26), we saw that nakedness, in the Bible, is connected with the idea of shame (cf. Mic. 1:11; Nah. 3:5; Rev. 3:18); and shame, in the Bible, is connected with the reality of our sin and guilt. So, just like with the bells on the robe, the point of these undergarments is not so much the “blushing” of God as it is the priest’s own **shame** and **unworthiness** in His holy presence. Which explains, then, why we read: “[The linen undergarments] shall be on Aaron and on his sons when they go into the tent of meeting or when they come near the altar to minister in the Holy Place, **lest they bear guilt and die.**”

² Like all the rest of the priest’s garments, his undergarments were also made of “fine twined linen.” (cf. Exod. 39:28)

Conclusion

What do we learn from our passage this morning? The main thing I think we learn is that it's a **big deal** to come into the presence of God. The Bible says:

- 1 Peter 2:5 — You yourselves like living stones are being built up as a **spiritual house [temple]**, to be a **holy priesthood**, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

The “church” is, uniquely and especially the temple of God; and in *these* times, uniquely and especially, we are entering into the presence of God. And just because we live under the New Covenant doesn't mean that this entering into the presence of God is **any less** of a **big deal**. How can we possibly be doing what we're doing now? Only **fully conscious** of the fact that we are **fully clothed** in the righteousness of Christ.

- Galatians 3:27 (NASB; cf. 2 Cor. 5:21) — For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.
- 1 Corinthians 1:30 (cf. Phil. 3:8-9) — Because of [God] you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption.

Because we are clothed fully and completely in the garments of Christ's righteousness, we can worship in God's presence **safely**, and even **confidently**, and with **joy and gladness**. (cf. Heb. 4:16; 10:19) And yet this **necessity** of being fully and completely clothed in Christ's righteousness should also produce in us a holy **fear** and **trembling**, knowing that were we *not* clothed, we could never worship in God's presence, and should we even be able to try, we would never come out alive.

I'm reminded of the chorus from some years ago: “**Come just as you are**; Hear the spirit call; **Come just as you are**; Come and see; Come receive; Come and live forever.” Contrary to the hymn “Just As I Am,” the words of this chorus are vague enough that they could easily be an invitation to eternal death. Can you imagine what would happen if any Old Testament Israelite had responded to a song like this and came “just as he was” and entered into Yahweh's holy tent to share in the delights of His house? All his so-called “sincerity” would count for nothing, *and he would have died*.

What ever happened to “fear and trembling”? It's been replaced with “**casual**,” and even “cool.” I don't want all of you men wearing ties and dress pants on Sunday morning, because I don't want to unnecessarily give the impression of being a “legalistic” church. There's no *special* church dress code in the Bible. God has never been impressed with anything I've ever worn to Church. *For me*, I just want my “wearing this” to be a way of guarding against treating this time **casually** – like any other time. The Bible has no rules about bringing food and drinks into the meetings on Sunday morning, and any “stated preferences” we might have are only for practical reasons). *For me*, I want my abstaining from food and drink during prayer meeting and worship to be a way of guarding against any hint of treating these times casually – like any other time. Of course, God is always looking at our *hearts*. I could *not* bring my coffee, and yet be far more displeasing to God than the one who does. I could turn this choice into a reason for legalistic

arrogance. *Having said this, it's still a healthy thing to consider what things might be appropriate, and what things might not be appropriate to a true heart attitude of "fear and trembling" in God's presence.* What we've learned this morning is that **it's a big deal(!!!)** to come into the presence of God.

How does the following description of "What to expect" at church fit with the realities of Exodus 28?

"We know that when you visit a church for the first time it can be an overwhelming experience...so let's set the stage and hopefully put you at ease. When you arrive you can expect to be greeted by a smile and a truly joyful welcome... 'cause we are thrilled you're here. Please take a moment to grab a cup of coffee or tea before you head into the auditorium. (It's FREE and feel free to take your drink in with you) Our atmosphere is casual and relaxed so come however you feel comfortable...we're a "come as you are" church. Our services are generally 60 minutes and are filled with exciting, contemporary worship as well as a thought-provoking, real and relevant message based on the Bible. We anticipate God touching your heart while you're here."

I want you to know that I cried. I had tears in my eyes. How could I not, after being immersed in the truth of Exodus 28? I went to the "what to expect" tab on other church websites and found that while it wasn't always quite as blatant, the **emphasis** was still more often than not on "you" – on your comfort, on your experience, and on putting you at **ease**. This is all in the context of "what to expect" when the holy priesthood gathers together as a holy temple, to offer up the holy sacrifices of worship to God. So, if we had a "what to expect" tab on our website, what would it say? What *should* it say? What would *you* write?

No matter what our outward forms may be, in our hearts we can still be treating God and His worship just as "casually" as any other church in the world. And it's our hearts—it's *my* heart—that God sees. I believe that the most powerful and attractive testimony we can ever have as a church is to be a church where all of us, together, have learned to **fear and tremble** from the heart – because we **know** that there is only one way to **safely**, and *therefore* **confidently and joyfully**, enter His presence; and that's as a holy priesthood fully and completely clothed in the protective covering of Christ's righteousness. How will you be *obedient* to the Word of God in Exodus 28? Parents, how will you pass this teaching of God's Word on to your children? The author of Hebrews writes:

- Hebrews 12:28–29 (cf. 2 Cor. 6:17-7:1; Phil. 2:12; 1 Pet. 1:14-19; 2:17) — Let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus **let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.**

And listen to the Psalmist:

- Psalm 96:1–9 (cf. 29:1-9) — Oh sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth! Sing to the LORD, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples! For **great** is the LORD, and **greatly to be praised**; he is to be **feared** above all gods. For all the gods of the peoples are

worthless idols, but the LORD made the heavens. **Splendor and majesty** are before him; **strength and beauty** are in his sanctuary. Ascribe to the LORD, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength! Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; bring an offering, and come into his courts! **Worship the LORD in [in holy attire; NET/NASB] tremble before him, all the earth!**

Maybe now we can skip ahead to Exodus 39 and read with a growing wonder, and appreciation, and thankfulness:

X. Exodus 39:1–31

From the blue and purple and scarlet yarns they made finely woven garments, for ministering in the Holy Place. They made the holy garments for Aaron, as the LORD had commanded Moses.

He made the ephod of gold, blue and purple and scarlet yarns, and fine twined linen. And they hammered out gold leaf, and he cut it into threads to work into the blue and purple and the scarlet yarns, and into the fine twined linen, in skilled design. They made for the ephod attaching shoulder pieces, joined to it at its two edges. And the skillfully woven band on it was of one piece with it and made like it, of gold, blue and purple and scarlet yarns, and fine twined linen, as the LORD had commanded Moses.

He made the breastpiece, in skilled work, in the style of the ephod, of gold, blue and purple and scarlet yarns, and fine twined linen. It was square. They made the breastpiece doubled, a span its length and a span its breadth when doubled... And they made on the breastpiece twisted chains like cords, of pure gold. And they made two settings of gold filigree and two gold rings, and put the two rings on the two edges of the breastpiece. And they put the two cords of gold in the two rings at the edges of the breastpiece. They attached the two ends of the two cords to the two settings of filigree. Thus they attached it in front to the shoulder pieces of the ephod. Then they made two rings of gold, and put them at the two ends of the breastpiece, on its inside edge next to the ephod. And they made two rings of gold, and attached them in front to the lower part of the two shoulder pieces of the ephod, at its seam above the skillfully woven band of the ephod. And they bound the breastpiece by its rings to the rings of the ephod with a lace of blue, so that it should lie on the skillfully woven band of the ephod, and that the breastpiece should not come loose from the ephod, as the LORD had commanded Moses.

He also made the robe of the ephod woven all of blue, and the opening of the robe in it was like the opening in a garment, with a binding around the opening, so that it might not tear. On the hem of the robe they made pomegranates of blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen. They also made bells of pure gold, and put the bells between the pomegranates all around the hem of the robe, between the pomegranates— a bell and a pomegranate, a bell and a pomegranate around the hem of the robe for ministering, as the LORD had commanded Moses.

They also made the tunics, woven of fine linen, for Aaron and his sons, and the turban of fine linen, and the caps of fine linen, and the linen undergarments of fine twined linen, and the sash of fine twined linen and of blue and purple and scarlet yarns, embroidered with needlework, as the LORD had commanded Moses.

They made the plate of the holy crown of pure gold, and wrote on it an inscription, like the engraving of a signet, "Holy to the LORD." And they tied to it a cord of blue to fasten it on the turban above, as the LORD had commanded Moses.

The High Priest's Golden Garments

Shemot/Exodus 28



