

Parashah 20

Tetzaveh

תצוה

“You are to order”

Exodus 27:20 – 30:10

Torah Together



This *Torah* portion describes the construction of the garments worn by the priests. It also details the ordination ceremony that was to be conducted for Aaron and his sons, the first men appointed by God to serve Him as priests. Finally, the construction of the last furnishing for the inside of the Tabernacle is described, the Altar of Incense. There is a great deal of symbolism to be found in this portion.

1. Oil for the Lampstand - 27:20-21

a) What fuel was to be used for the lamps in the tabernacle? Whose job was it to keep these lamps lit? When were they to be lit?

The lamps were to be fueled with clear, pressed olive oil, not crushed or cloudy (implying impurity). Aaron and his sons were to keep them lit from evening till morning.

b) What symbolism do you find in the oil for the lamps?

Oil is often symbolic of the Holy Spirit. Here, the Holy Spirit is pure and clear and provides the source for our light unto the world.

2. The Priestly Garments - 28:1-5

Who did God designate to serve as priests? Who was to make their garments? What materials were to be used to make these garments?

Aaron and his four sons (Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar) were to serve as priests. The garments were to be made by “skilled men” to whom God would give wisdom in such matters (verse 3). They were to be made of fine linen and with gold, blue, purple, and scarlet yarn.

3. The Ephod - 28:6-14

a) Describe the ephod. Of what materials was it made?

The ephod was an apron-like garment with straps over the shoulders. It was made of fine linen interwoven or embroidered with gold and blue, purple, and scarlet threads.

Scripture Link:

In ancient times, kings and other leaders were often “anointed with oil” as a part of their ordination process. **Luke 4:18** may provide a better understanding of the symbolic meaning of oil in the Bible.

The Aaronic Priesthood

God, in His sovereign will, chose Moses brother, Aaron, to be Israel’s first High Priest (*Cohen Gadol* in Hebrew). Furthermore, God intended that Israel’s priests would always be descendants of Aaron. More information about the Aaronic Priesthood is included in the later books of the *Torah*.

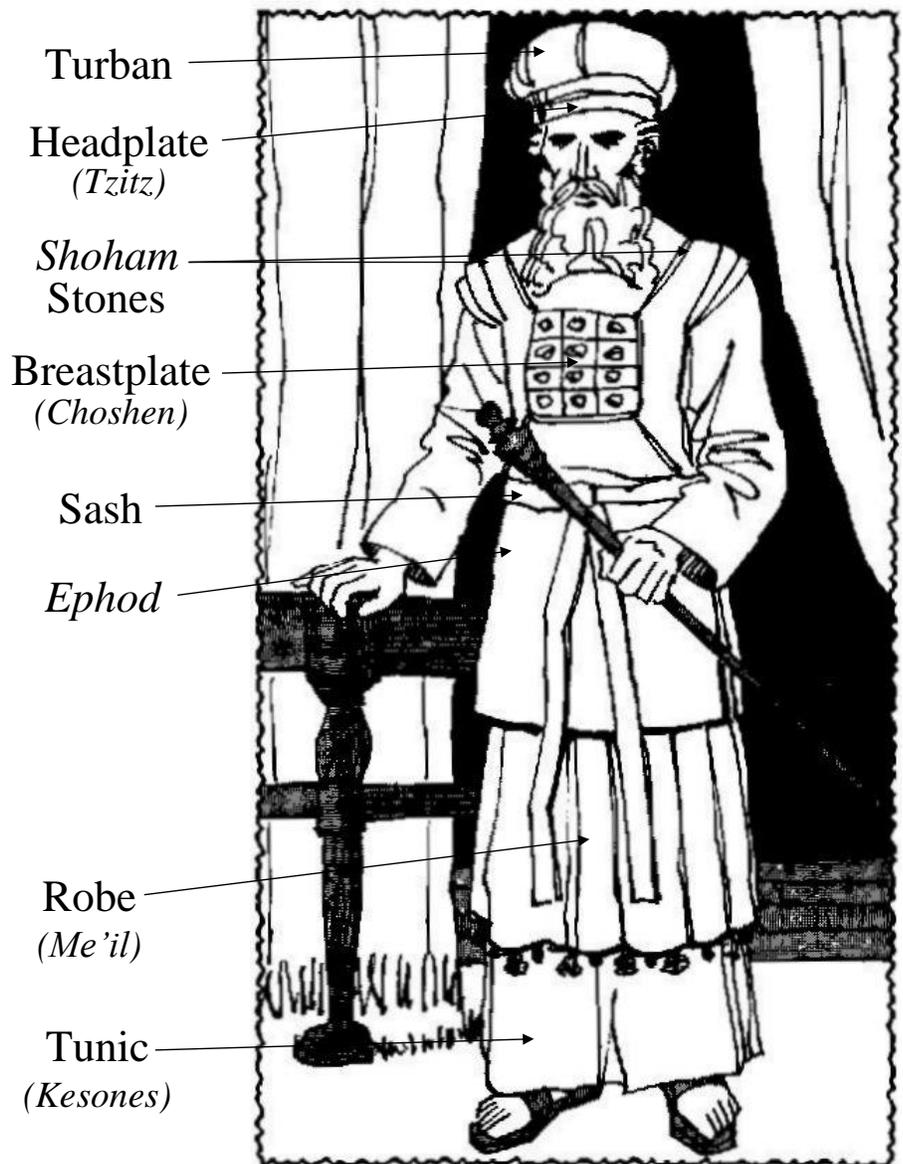
What's in a Name?

According to **Exodus 28:9-10**, the *shoham* stones mounted on the shoulder straps of the ephod were engraved with the names of the **twelve sons** of Israel. Thus the names Levi and Joseph would have been included but not Ephraim and Manasseh.

b) What was mounted on the ephod's shoulder straps? Exactly what was engraved on these? According to verse 12, what was the purpose of these two items?

On each shoulder strap was an onyx stone set in a gold mounting. Called the shoham stones, each was engraved with the names of six of Jacob's sons, listed in the order of their birth. Aaron was to bear these names on his shoulders as a memorial before God. Thus Aaron represented the sons of Israel as he ministered before God.

The High Priest - *Kohen Gadol*



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4. The Breastplate - 28:15-30

a) Describe the breastplate. About what was its size? How was it attached to the ephod? According to verse 15, what was its purpose?

The breastplate, or choshen (pronounced “khoshen”), was an embroidered linen piece about 6” x 6”. It was folded so that it formed a pocket. It had gold chains at the upper corners that fastened it to the shoulder straps of the ephod. The bottom was fastened to the ephod with blue cord. The choshen was “for making decisions.”

b) What was mounted on the breastplate? What was to be engraved on these? Do you think these were the same words that were engraved on the ephod?

On the front of the choshen were four rows of three gemstones, one for each of the tribes of Israel. (The translations of the names for these gems are the subject of some debate.) On each stone was engraved the name of one of the tribes. On the shoham stones were engraved the names of Jacob’s sons, including Levi and Joseph but not Ephraim and Manasseh. Some believe that the stones in the choshen included the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh but excluded the Levites as they served as priests for all of Israel.

c) What was kept in the breastpiece? What do you know about these items and how they were used?

Inside the choshen were placed the urim and the thummim. Little is known about these items. It is conjectured that they were a type of lot that was cast to determine God’s answer to specific inquiries made by the High Priest.

5. Other Priestly Garments - 28:31-43

a) Describe the robe that the High Priest (*Kohen Gadol*) wore beneath the ephod. What items decorated them hem of this garment? What was their purpose (verse 35)?

Beneath the ephod, the High Priest wore a blue robe called a me’il. It was a single piece of material with a reinforced opening for the head. The hem of this robe had alternating “pomegranates” (little cloth balls) and small gold bells on it. Thus the High Priest could be heard as he walked around inside the tabernacle.

b) Describe the headplate that was to be worn by Aaron. What words were engraved on it? According to verse 38, what was its function?

The headplate (tzitz) was pure gold and fastened to the turban. On it were engraved the words Kodesh YHWH, or Holy to YHWH. In this way, “Aaron bore the guilt involved in the offerings brought by the Israelites.”

What’s in a Name?

According to **Exodus 28:21**, the names engraved on the stones of the breastplate (*choshen*) were those of the **twelve tribes** of Israel. It is believed that these stones were used when inquiring of God concerning the various tribes and that God would indicate a specific tribe through the illumination of that tribe’s stone.

Light and Perfections

Urim and *Thummim* are Hebrew words meaning “lights” and “perfections.” Exactly what they were and how they worked has been lost over time. It is believed that these objects, thought to be stones, were consulted by the High Priest whenever a question was to be put before God. It is conjectured that one of these “stones” (the *Urim*) would light up when God was answering the question. The other stone would indicate a ‘yes’ or a ‘no’ answer. References to the *Urim* and *Thummim* are found up through the times of David and Solomon, but it is believed that King Josiah hid them (along with other sacred objects from the Temple) when he knew that Jerusalem would soon be conquered by the Babylonians. No record of their existence occurs after this.

c) Under the robe (*me'il*), Aaron wore a tunic of what material? What other garments were made of this material?

Aaron and his sons wore tunics and undergarments made of linen.

“This is to be a lasting ordinance for Aaron and his descendants.”
Exodus 28:43

6. Consecration of the Priests - 29:1-46

a) What things were presented as offerings for Aaron and his sons? What was done to Aaron after he was cleansed and dressed in his priestly garments?

Offerings consisted of a young bull, two rams, wheat cakes (w/o yeast) and wafers. Aaron was anointed with oil (verse 7).

b) Describe the process followed for the first animal sacrificed in the ordination ceremony. What was the purpose of this sacrifice? (See verse 14.)

Aaron and his sons laid their hands on the head of the bull before it was slaughtered. This laying on of the hands transferred the sin from the person or persons to the animal. The animal's blood was used to consecrate the altar. Part of the bull was burned on the altar, the rest outside the camp. It was a sin offering.

c) What two animals were sacrificed next? According to verse 18, what parts of the first of these animals were consumed by fire? What was this sacrifice called?

The 2 rams were sacrificed next. The first ram was sacrificed like the bull. Its blood was used to consecrate the altar and the entire animal was burned on the altar (after washing the inner parts). It was a burnt offering to God.

d) Describe the process for the sacrifice of the second of this pair of animals. What symbolism is suggested to you by the actions in verse 20? How was this offering different than the previous one? What was done with this offering before it was burned? What name(s) are given to this type of offering? (See verse 28.) How is it different than the previous two offerings described?

The second ram was slaughtered in the same way. Some of its blood was placed on the right ear lobes, the right thumbs, and the right big toes of Aaron and his sons. Perhaps this symbolized the need for Aaron and his sons to hear from God and to act and walk in God's leading. Some of the blood from this offering was used to consecrate Aaron and his sons and their garments. This offering (along with the cakes and wafers) was waved before God. It was called a peace or fellowship offering. Part of this offering was not burned but was to be eaten by Aaron and his sons.

Scripture Link:

The ceremony for the ordination of Aaron and his sons as priests seems very detailed. This ceremony is described in even more detail in **Leviticus 8**. The entire process (which lasted seven days) may seem very strange to us because we cannot identify with the culture that existed at this time. However, there is much that can be learned by considering God's rules for dealing with sin and restoring communion with Him.

e) Describe the rest of the ordination ceremony. How long did the whole process last?

Aaron and his sons were to eat the remaining meat and bread offerings at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. Any leftovers were to be burned up. The entire ordination process took seven days.

f) Describe the daily regular sacrifice that God defines in verses 38-43. How long was this sacrifice to continue? Do you see any types and shadows here?

Twice a day (morning and twilight) a lamb was to be offered along with a grain and drink offering. This was to be done "for the generations to come."

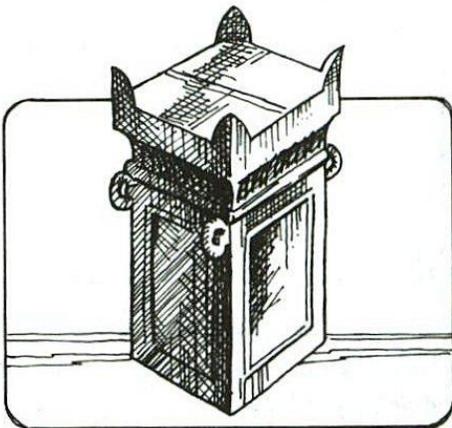
g) The consecration of Aaron and his sons involved cleansing, anointing, and sacrificial offering. How does this compare with the consecration of our new High Priest?

Our High Priest, Yeshua, was cleansed (by baptism), anointed (with the Holy Spirit), and provided a sacrifice (Himself).

7. The Altar of Incense - 30:1-10

Describe the altar of incense. Where was it to be placed? Who was to tend to it and when? What was to be done once a year? What symbolism can you see here? (We'll learn more about this ceremony later.)

The altar of incense, about 1.5 ft square by 3 ft high, was made of acacia wood covered with gold (like the Ark). It was placed in front of the curtain separating the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place. Typically, the continuously burning incense represents the prayer of the saints. (See Revelation 5:8, 8:3) We learn more about the Day of Atonement later.



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Scripture Link:

Notice that incense was to be burning on this Altar perpetually. For a clue as to the symbolism of this, see **Revelation 5:8 and 8:3.**

Digging deeper

1. On the *Shoham* stones on the shoulder straps of the *Ephod* were engraved with the names of the sons of *Israel* (Jacob). On the breastplate, however, were the names of the tribes of *Israel*. Can you see any symbolic meaning in having the names of the sons of *Israel* on the High Priest's shoulders and the names of the tribes of *Israel* on the breastplate?

One possible symbolic meaning is that the High Priest carried the sons of Israel on his shoulders as he ministered before their God. Thus he "carried the burden" of representing the sons of Israel before God. By contrast, he carried the tribes of Israel on his heart. Thus the High Priest was responsible for communicating God's instructions (or "showing God's heart") to the tribes of Israel as they conducted their daily lives. This summarizes the role of the High Priest: to represent Israel to God and to represent God to Israel. Of course, other meanings are possible.

2. Study the following passages in **Hebrews: 4:14-5:10; 7:23- 8:6; 9:1-14**. What insight do you gain from these passages into the differences between the Aaronic priesthood and the priesthood of *Yeshua* (or the priesthood of believers)?

The writer of Hebrews makes it clear that the priesthood of Yeshua is superior to that of Aaron. Our High Priest provided the ultimate sacrifice for our sins (His own life) and continually intercedes for us in the presence of God. The Aaronic High Priest had to continually make sacrifices just to be able to intercede for the people in the presence of God. The Aaronic High Priest died and had to be succeeded by his heir; ours lives forever and will never be succeeded. There are many other illuminating comparisons between the two priesthoods. (Hebrews 9:16-22 describes the "death" required for the new will (or testament) to be in force.)

For further study, see
Haftarah : Ezekiel 43:10-27
Brit Hadashah : Philippians 4:10-20