



*And thou shalt set in it settings of stones, even four rows of stones: the first row shall be a sardius, a topaz, and a carbuncle: this shall be the first row. And the second row shall be an emerald, a sapphire, and a diamond. And the third row a ligure, an agate, and an amethyst. And the fourth row a beryl, and an onyx, and a jasper: they shall be set in gold in their inclosings. And the stones shall be with the names of the children of Israel, twelve, according to their names, like the engravings of a signet; every one with his name shall they be according to the twelve tribes. (Ex 28:17-21)*

These few mid-chapters of Exodus are, I admit, the most difficult to write for the research and deep thought required in writing them. When we observe the elaborate detail of construction and the ornate dress required of priests, we may be inclined to believe that the Romans got it right after all with their miters and gold embroidered vestments - but we would be mistaken. The Tabernacle was built during a day when men knew very little of the Person of God, the reverence due Him, and the strict obedience necessary to please Him. God found it necessary to stress dress, formality, and solemnity in order to introduce His covenant to the people, else they would not have paid attention. Though solemnity, reverence, and formality are still an important component of worship, the symbols and figures God required in the Tabernacle (and the Temple) are somewhat relaxed for the New Testament Church. The Romanizers who draw their justification for miters and gold embroidered vestments should, for consistency's sake, cover the outer walls of their fancy churches with goat's hair to make it less appealing to the world.

*1 And take thou unto thee Aaron thy brother, and his sons with him, from among the children of Israel, that he may minister unto me in the priest's office, even Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar, Aaron's sons. 2 And thou shalt make holy garments for Aaron thy brother for glory and for beauty. 3 And thou shalt speak unto all that are wise hearted, whom I have filled with the spirit of wisdom, that they may make Aaron's garments to consecrate him, that he may minister unto me in the priest's office. 4 And these are the garments which they shall make; a breastplate, and an ephod, and a robe, and a brodered coat, a mitre, and a girdle: and they shall make holy garments for Aaron thy brother, and his sons, that he may minister unto me in the priest's office. 5 And they shall take gold, and blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine linen. (Ex 28:1-5)*

Pursuant to the above comment, I have sometimes been asked by those not familiar with reformed worship, why I wear a clerical collar when not attending formal

activities of the church. Truly, it is not required; however, a soldier always wears his uniform for identification. When seen away from the military cantonment area, he is still recognized as a soldier. The same applies to police and medical personnel. Why is this the case? Because it is important, due to their professions, that such officials be recognized by the man on the street. Why should this be different for a clergyman, and perhaps more so? I have had numerous hurting people come to me and spill their hearts out over 'insurmountable' problems from caretakers, waiters, watchmen, and those traveling dark streets of the night. They are searching for an answer from a higher quarter than the world can provide. This presents an excellent opportunity for me to share the Gospel of Christ and what it has done to amend and bring light to my oft own broken heart.

Simple and dignified vestments are adopted by the Church in order to evoke a reverence and respect that would not otherwise be attributed to men who speak the very Words of God. We are held to a higher standard when we claim to be imparting the very Words of God. We should not only act with a deep reverence in reading the Word, but also appear in attire that set us apart from our daily routines. I am a firm believer in a soldier dressing like a soldier in hopes that his actions will follow his appearance; and the same holds true for those who would serve the Lord in His Holy Place. The pulpit is Holy, and it should not be ascended with unholy hands or common street attire. In fact, the attire of all worshippers should be their Sunday best since they have come to meet with the King of Kings. The garments were called HOLY, not because of the men who wore them, but because of the function they served for worship only. The primitive minds of the hosts were such that royalty should be reflected in finery, and so it was!

There were twelve different precious stones (see opening verses to this devotion) for each of the separated tribes of Israel. The stones were each of different quality and hue, but all beautiful and precious. I have made a summary study of the nature of the stones and can find no scripturally proven qualities of these individual stones that would commend our comment and study of them more than that which is given in the plain text.

*6 And they shall make the ephod of gold, of blue, and of purple, of scarlet, and fine twined linen, with cunning work. 7 It shall have the two shoulderpieces thereof joined at the two edges thereof; and so it shall be joined together. 8 And the curious girdle of the ephod, which is upon it, shall be of the same, according to the work thereof; even of gold, of blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine twined linen. 9 And thou shalt take two onyx stones, and grave on them the names of the children of Israel: 10 Six of their names on one stone, and the other six names of the rest on the other stone, according to their birth. 11 With the work of an engraver in stone, like the engravings of a signet, shalt thou engrave the two stones with the names of the children of Israel: thou shalt make them to be set in ouches of gold. 12 And thou shalt put the two stones upon the shoulders of the ephod for stones of memorial unto the children of Israel: and Aaron shall bear their names before the LORD upon his two shoulders for a memorial. 13 And thou shalt make ouches of gold; 14 And two chains of pure gold at the ends; of wreathen work shalt thou make them, and fasten the wreathen chains to the ouches. (Ex 28:6-14)*

The ephod was a strikingly impressive garment. There were two onyx stones affixed with the six names of the tribes of Israel on one, and the six names of the other tribes on the next. This was to remind the High Priest, in his ministrations before the Lord, to remember to plead the cause of each. The ephod was fastened by a girdle of the same costly materials, that is, dyed, embroidered, and wrought with threads of gold. It was about a handbreadth wide and wound twice round the upper part of the waist; it fastened in front, the ends hanging down at great length. This girdle followed after the heavenly example reflected in Rev. 1:13 in its reference to the appearance of Christ: *And*

*in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle. (Rev 1:13)*

We have a lengthy passage of the breastplate of judgment on which, too, were set the twelve stones – in order of birth – of the patriarchs of the twelve tribes. It was worn over the heart of the High Priest (Aaron) to keep him in constant mind of his people whom he represented before God. It would be praiseworthy as ministers today wore the names of their flocks over their hearts when serving the Lord and counseling His people. The device was called the Breastplate of Judgment since the High Priest always wore this breastplate when going before the Lord seeking judgment of a particular matter, or when he sat as judge to teach the law – or to hear cases. The Breastplate was four-square to symbolize the righteousness of just law. Today, we may refer to a gentleman or lady as being four-square (or simply square) if they are meticulously correct and fair in their dealings with others.

*30 And thou shalt put in the breastplate of judgment the Urim and the Thummim; and they shall be upon Aaron's heart, when he goeth in before the LORD: and Aaron shall bear the judgment of the children of Israel upon his heart before the LORD continually. (Ex 28:30)* I must frankly admit that I have no clue what the design of these stones was. Scripture nowhere tells us, and speculation in such case would not only be futile, but unholy. The meaning is clear: Urim means LIGHT; Thummim means perfection. Aaron, and the High Priests to follow, wore these on the Breastplate when conferring with the Lord on matters of national importance. They were conceived to give revealing light and justice in cases of such occasion as was asked. We have the very best Urim (the Light of God's Word) and Thummim (that perfect law of Liberty enjoyed in Christ) today in the Gospel.

*31 And thou shalt make the robe of the ephod all of blue. (Ex 28:31)* This robe resembles a cassock in design. One leading purpose of the robe was to make the wearer presentable before God. God cannot look upon sin, and the robe symbolically covers the sin of the wearer of the robe (and, today, cassock). There was a hole at the top to allow the garment to be placed over the head of the minister, and the neck opening was woven around with a stronger material to prevent rips. This may have made the neck opening appear similar to the clergy collar of today. *And there shall be an hole in the top of it, in the midst thereof: it shall have a binding of woven work round about the hole of it, as it were the hole of an habergeon, that it be not rent. (Ex 28:32)* You will remember the best robe the father placed over the shoulders of his prodigal son, when he returned. That beautiful robe covered the boy's filth from working in a pigsty.

*40 And for Aaron's sons thou shalt make coats, and thou shalt make for them girdles, and bonnets shalt thou make for them, for glory and for beauty. 41 And thou shalt put them upon Aaron thy brother, and his sons with him; and shalt anoint them, and consecrate them, and sanctify them, that they may minister unto me in the priest's office. 42 And thou shalt make them linen breeches to cover their nakedness; from the loins even unto the thighs they shall reach: 43 And they shall be upon Aaron, and upon his sons, when they come in unto the tabernacle of the congregation, or when they come near unto the altar to minister in the holy place; that they bear not iniquity, and die: it shall be a statute for ever unto him and his seed after him. (Ex 28:40-43)*

It seems proper for me to make some comment regarding vestments in the modern church. The vestments of the traditional Anglican church, from the days of the Reformers, has been of the most simple and plain design – primarily black and white with a scarf or stole to indicate seasons of the Church. Ornate and costly embroidery and ornaments of gold would no longer be pleasing to God since Christ came, as High Priest, to intercede on our behalf. Opulent and expensive dress is not useful to the

service of God for it detracts from the very Word that we preach. Moreover, it is pretentious since we no longer serve in the role of High Priest or absolve men and women of sin – that is the prerogative of God alone! But the wearing of vestments to set us apart from those we serve is a thing, I believe, to be pleasing to God. Formality in worship denotes respect and reverence for God. Today, many mainline churches advertise their services to be “come as you are.” WE DO NOT IN THE AOC. We believe that a person should be as presentable as possible when coming before the Lord. Decent dress reflects respect. Slovenly dress reflects disrespect for God and all around.

The vestments of surplice and cassock serve to give a modest appearance to the ministers of our church. If no such vestments were available (for example, in times of great want or emergency) then God would understand if we dispensed with such; but He has placed us in good pastures and given us the means to wear apparel that is both reverent and respectful of His Majesty. These demonstrate that the one adorned has been duly ordained and consecrated to the office, the uniform of which he wears. *And they shall be upon Aaron, and upon his sons, when they come in unto the tabernacle of the congregation, or when they come near unto the altar to minister in the holy place; that they bear not iniquity, and die: it shall be a statute for ever unto him and his seed after him.* I have had occasion to witness to many hurting hearts as a result of simply wearing my clergy shirt and collar on flights, to restaurants, and in other public venues. In Serbia, I was asked by many strangers on the streets to pray with them. Had I not be recognizable as a minister of God, I doubt such opportunities would have arisen.

I will quote an unlikely source for the necessity of vestments – General George S. Patton. He said: *“We catch a lot of rift over requiring soldiers to dress like soldiers – to be in proper uniform at all times. But I believe that a man who dresses like a soldier will tend to ACT like one. If he doesn’t LOOK like a soldier, he probably isn’t.”* He also wisely observed, *“The longer I live, the more convinced I am of the need for formality in worship.”* I agree. How about you?

