

CHAPTER 28

Orders being given for the fitting up of the place of worship, in this and the following chapter care is taken about the priests that were to minister in this holy place, as the menial servants of the God of Israel. He hired servants, as a token of his purpose to reside among them. In this chapter,

I. He pitches upon the persons who should be his servants (v. 1).

II. He appoints their livery; their work was holy, and so must their garments be, and unanswerable to the glory of the house which was now to be erected (v. 2-5).

1. He appoints the garments of his head-servant, the high priest, which were very rich.

(1.) An ephod and girdle, (v. 6-14).

(2.) A breast-plate of judgment (v. 15-29), in which must be put the urim and thummim (v. 30).

(3.) The robe of the ephod (v. 31-35).

(4.) The mitre (v. 36-39).

2. The garments of the inferior priests (v. 40-43). And these also were shadows of good things to come.

~~281~~ EXODUS 28:1-5

THE PRIESTS' ATTIRE

We have here,

I. The priests nominated: *Aaron and his sons*, v. 1. Hitherto every master of a family was priest to his own family, and offered, as he saw cause, upon altars of earth; but now that the families of Israel began to be incorporated into a nation, and a *tabernacle of the congregation* was to be erected, as a visible centre of their unity, it was requisite there should be a public priesthood instituted. Moses, who had hitherto officiated, and is therefore reckoned among the *priests of the Lord* (~~1996~~ Psalm 99:6), had enough to do as their prophet to consult the oracle for them, and as their prince to judge among them; nor was he desirous to engross all the

honours to himself, or to entail that of the priesthood, which alone was hereditary, upon his own family, but was very well pleased to see his brother Aaron invested in this office, and his sons after him, while (how great soever he was) his sons after him would be but common Levites. It is an instance of the humility of that great man, and an evidence of his sincere regard for the glory of God, that he had so little regard to the preferment of his own family. Aaron, who had humbly served as a prophet to his younger brother Moses, and did not decline the office (^{Exodus} 7:1), is now advanced to be a priest, a high priest to God; for he will exalt those that abase themselves. Nor could any man have *taken this honour to himself*, but he that was *called of God to it*, ^{Hebrews} 5:4. God had said of Israel in general that they should be to him a *kingdom of priests*, ^{Exodus} 19:6. But because it was requisite that those who ministered at the altar should give themselves wholly to the service, and because that which is every body's work will soon come to be nobody's work, God here chose from among them one to be a family of priests, the father and his four sons; and from Aaron's loins descended all the priests of the Jewish church, of whom we read so often, both in the Old Testament and in the New. A blessed thing it is when real holiness goes, as the ceremonial holiness did, by succession in a family.

II. The priests' garments appointed, *for glory and beauty*, v. 2. Some of the richest materials were to be provided (v. 5), and the best artists employed in the making of them, whose skill God, by a *special gift* for this purpose, would improve to a very high degree, v. 3. Note, Eminence, even in common arts, is a gift of God, it comes from him, and, as there is occasion, it ought to be used for him. He that teaches the husbandman discretion teaches the tradesman also; both therefore ought to honour God with their gain. Human learning ought particularly to be consecrated to the service of the priesthood, and employed for the adorning of those that minister about holy things. The garments appointed were,

1. Four, which both the high priest and the inferior priests wore, namely, the linen breeches, the linen coat, the linen girdle which fastened it to them, and the bonnet or turban; that which the high priest wore is called a *mitre*.

2. Four more, which were peculiar to the high priest, namely, the ephod, with the curious girdle of it, the breast-plate of judgment, the long robe

with the bells and pomegranates at the bottom of it, and the golden plate on his forehead. These glorious garments were appointed,

(1.) That the priests themselves might be reminded of the dignity of their office, and might behave themselves with due decorum.

(2.) That the people might thereby be possessed with a holy reverence of that God whose ministers appeared in such grandeur.

(3.) That the priests might be types of Christ, who should offer himself without spot to God, and of all Christians, who have the beauty of holiness put upon them, in which they are consecrated to God. Our adorning, now under the gospel, both that of ministers and Christians, is not to be of gold, and pearl, and costly array, but the *garments of salvation, and the robe of righteousness*, ^{<211D>}Isaiah 61:10; ^{<412D>}Psalm 132:9, 16. As the filthy garments wherewith Joshua the high priest was clothed signified the iniquity which cleaved to his priesthood, from which care was taken that it should be purged (^{<388B>}Zechariah 3:3, 4.), so those *holy garments* signified the perfect purity that there is in the priesthood of Christ; he is holy, harmless, and undefiled.

^{<0286>}EXODUS 28:6-14

THE PRIESTS' ATTIRE

Directions are here given concerning the ephod, which was the outmost garment of the high priest. *Linen* ephods were worn by the inferior priests, ^{<0228>}1 Samuel 22:18. Samuel wore one when he was a child (^{<0228>}1 Samuel 2:18), and David when he danced before the ark (^{<1064>}2 Samuel 6:14); but this which the high priest only wore was called a *golden ephod*, because there was a great deal of gold woven into it. It was a short coat without sleeves, buttoned closely to him, with a curious girdle of the same stuff (v. 6-8); the shoulder-pieces were buttoned together with two precious stones set in gold, one on each shoulder, on which were engraven the names of the *children of Israel*, v. 9-12. In allusion to this,

1. Christ our high priest appeared to John *girt about the breast with a golden girdle*, such as was the curious girdle of the ephod, ^{<0113>}Revelation 1:13. Righteousness is the girdle of his loins (^{<2116>}Isaiah 11:6), and should

be of ours, ^{<464>}Ephesians 6:14. He is girt with strength for the work of our salvation, and is ready for it.

2. The government is said to be *upon his shoulders* (^{<206>}Isaiah 9:6), as Aaron had the names of all Israel upon his shoulders in precious stone. He presents to himself and to his Father *a glorious church*, ^{<467>}Ephesians 5:27. He has power to support them, interest to recommend them, and it is in him that they are remembered with honour and favour. He bears them before the Lord *for a memorial* (v. 12), in token of his *appearing before God* as the representative of all Israel and an advocate for them.

^{<285>}EXODUS 28:15-30

AARON'S ATTIRE

The most considerable of the ornaments of the high priest was this breast-plate, a rich piece of cloth, curiously wrought with gold and purple, etc., two spans long and a span broad, so that, being doubled, it was a span square, v. 16. This was fastened to the ephod with wreathen chains of gold (v. 13, 14, 22, etc.) both at top and bottom, so that *the breast-plate might not be loosed from the ephod*, v. 28. The ephod was the garment of service; the breast-plate of judgment was an emblem of honour: these two must by no means be separated. If any man will *minister unto the Lord*, and *do his will*, he shall *know his doctrine*. In this breast-plate,

I. The tribes of Israel were recommended to God's favour in twelve precious stones, v. 17-21, 19. Some question whether Levi had a precious stone with his name or no. If not, Ephraim and Manasseh were reckoned distinct, as Jacob had said they should be, and the high priest himself, being head of the tribe of Levi, sufficiently represented that tribe. If there was a stone for Levi, as is intimated by this, that they were *engraven according to their birth* (v. 10), Ephraim and Manasseh were one in Joseph. Aaron was to bear their names for a *memorial before the Lord continually*, being *ordained for men*, to represent them in things pertaining to God, herein typifying our great high priest, who always appears in the presence of God for us.

1. Though the people were forbidden to come near, and obliged to keep their distance, yet by the high priest, who had their names on his breast-

plate, they entered into the holiest; so believers, even while they are here on this earth, not only *enter into the holiest*, but by faith are made to *sit with Christ in heavenly places*, ^{<406>}Ephesians 2:6.

2. The name of each tribe was engraven in a precious stone, to signify how precious, in God's sight, believers are, and how honourable, ^{<394>}Isaiah 43:4. They shall be his in the day he *makes up his jewels*, ^{<397>}Malachi 3:17. How small and poor soever the tribe was, it was a precious stone in the breast-plate of the high priest; thus are all the saints dear to Christ, and his delight is in them as the excellent ones of the earth, however men may esteem them as *earthen pitchers*, ^{<202>}Lamentations 4:2.

3. The high priest had the names of the tribes both on his shoulders and on his breast, intimating both the power and the love with which our Lord Jesus intercedes for those that are his. He not only bears them up *upon his heart*, as the expression here is (v. 29), *carries them in his bosom* (^{<291>}Isaiah 40:11), with the most tender affection. How near should Christ's name be to our hearts, since he is pleased to lay our names so near his! and what a comfort it is to us, in all our addresses to God, that the great high priest of our profession has the names of all his Israel upon his breast before the Lord *for a memorial*, presenting them to God as the people of his choice, who were to be made *accepted in the beloved*! Let not any good Christians fear that God has forgotten them, nor question his being mindful of them upon all occasions, when they are not only engraven upon the *palms of his hands* (^{<296>}Isaiah 49:16), but engraven upon the heart of the great intercessor. See ^{<216>}Song of Solomon 8:6.

II. The urim and thummim, by which the will of God was made known in doubtful cases, were put in this breast-plate, which is therefore called the *breast-plate of judgment*, v. 30. *Urim* and *thummim* signify *light* and *integrity*; many conjectures there are among the learned what they were; we have no reason to think they were any thing that Moses was to make more than what was before ordered, so that either God made them himself, and gave them to Moses, for him to put into the breast-plate, when other things were prepared (^{<888>}Leviticus 8:8), or no more is meant than a declaration of the further use of what was already ordered to be made. I think the words may be read thus, *And thou shalt give, or add, or deliver, to the breast-plate of judgment, the illuminations and perfections, and they shall be upon the heart of Aaron*; that is, "He shall be endued with a power of knowing and making known the mind of God in all difficult

doubtful cases, relating either to the civil or ecclesiastical state of the nation.” Their government was a theocracy: God was their King, the high priest was, under God, their ruler, the urim and thummim were his cabinet-council; probably Moses wrote upon the breast-plate, or wove into it, these words, *Urim and Thummim*, to signify that the high priest, having on him this breast-plate, and asking counsel of God in any emergency relating to the public, should be directed to take those measures, and give that advice, which God would own. If he was standing before the ark (but without the veil) probably he received instructions from off the mercy-seat, as Moses did (^{<0252>}Exodus 25:22); thus, it should seem, Phinehas did, ^{<0717>}Judges 20:27, 28. If he was at a distance from the ark, as Abiathar was when he enquired of the Lord for David (^{<0236>}1 Samuel 23:6, etc.), then the answer was given either by a voice from heaven or rather by an impulse upon the mind of the high priest, which last is perhaps intimated in that expression, *He shall bear the judgment of the children of Israel upon his heart*. This oracle was of great use to Israel; Joshua consulted it (^{<0271>}Numbers 27:21), and, it is likely, the judges after him. It was lost in the captivity, and never regained after, though, it should seem, it was expected, ^{<0183>}Ezra 2:63. But it was a shadow of good things to come, and the substance is Christ. He is our oracle; by him God in these last days makes known himself and his mind to us, ^{<0302>}Hebrews 1:2; ^{<0318>}John 1:18. Divine revelation centres in him, and comes to us through him; he is the light, the true light, the faithful witness, the truth itself, and from him we receive the Spirit of truth, who leads into all truth. The joining of the breast-plate to the ephod denotes that his prophetic office was founded in his priesthood; and it was by the merit of his death that he purchased this honour for himself and this favour for us. It was the *Lamb that had been slain* that was worthy to *take the book and to open the seals*, ^{<0189>}Revelation 5:9.

^{<0281>}EXODUS 28:31-39

AARON'S ATTIRE

Here is,

1. Direction given concerning *the robe of the ephod*, v. 31-35. This was next under the ephod, and reached down to the knees, was without sleeves,

and was put on over their head, having holes on the sides to put the arms through, or, as Maimonides describes it, was not sewed together on the sides at all. The hole on the top, through which the head was put, was carefully bound about, that it might not tear in the putting on. In religious worship, care must be taken to prevent every thing that may distract the minds of the worshippers, or render the service despicable. Round the skirts of the robe were hung golden bells, and the representations of pomegranates made of yarn of divers colours. The pomegranates added to the beauty of the robe, and the sound of the bells gave notice to the people in the outer court when he went into the holy place to burn incense, that they might then apply themselves to their devotions at the same time (~~400~~ Luke 1:10), in token of their concurrence with him in his offering, and their hopes of the ascent of their prayers to God in virtue of the incense he offered. Aaron must come near to minister in the garments that were appointed him, *that he die not*. It is at his peril if he attend otherwise than according to the institution. This intimates that we must serve the Lord *with fear* and holy *trembling*, as those that know we deserve to die, and are in danger of making some fatal mistake. Some make the bells of the holy robe to typify the sound of the gospel of Christ in the world, giving notice of his entrance within the veil for us. *Blessed are those that hear this joyful sound*, ~~405~~ Psalm 89:15. The adding of the pomegranates, which are a fragrant fruit, denotes the sweet savour of the gospel, as well as the joyful sound of it, for it is a *savour of life unto life*. The church is called an *orchard of pomegranates*.

2. Concerning the golden plate fixed upon Aaron's forehead, on which must be engraven, *Holiness to the Lord* (v. 36, 37), or *The holiness of Jehovah*. Aaron must hereby be reminded that God is holy, and that his priests must be holy. *Holiness becomes his house* and household. The high priest must be sequestered from all pollution, and consecrated to God and to his service and honour, and so must all his ministrations be. All that attend in God's house must have *Holiness to the Lord* engraven upon their foreheads, that is, they must be holy, devoted to the Lord, and designing his glory in all they do. This must appear in their forehead, in an open profession of their relation to God, as those that are not ashamed to own it, and in a conversation in the world answerable to it. It must likewise be engraven like the engravings of a signet, so deep, so durable, not painted to be washed off, but sincere and lasting; such must our *holiness to the Lord* be. Aaron must have this upon his forehead, that he may *bear the*

iniquity of the holy things (v. 38), and that *they may be accepted before the Lord*. Herein he was a type of Christ, the great Mediator between God and man, through whom it is that we have to do with God.

(1.) Through him what is amiss in our services is pardoned. The divine law is strict; in many things we come short of our duty, so that we cannot but be conscious to ourselves of much iniquity cleaving even to our holy things; when we would do good evil is present; even this would be our ruin if God should enter into judgment with us. But Christ, our high priest, bears this iniquity, bears it for us so as to bear it from us, and through him it is forgiven to us and not laid to our charge.

(2.) Through him what is good is accepted; our persons, our performances, are pleasing to God upon the account of Christ's intercession, and not otherwise, ^{<4015>}1 Peter 2:5. His being *holiness to the Lord* recommends all those to the divine favour that are interested in his righteousness, and clothed with his Spirit; and therefore he has said it was for our sakes that he *sanctified himself*, ^{<4179>}John 17:19. Having *such a high priest*, we come *boldly to the throne of grace*, ^{<3044>}Hebrews 4:14-16.

3. The rest of the garments are but named (v. 39), because there was nothing extraordinary in them. The embroidered coat of fine linen was the innermost of the priestly garments; it reached to the feet, and the sleeves to the wrists, and was bound to the body with a girdle or sash of needle-work. The mitre, or diadem, was of linen, such as kings anciently wore in the east, typifying the kingly office of Christ. He is a *priest upon a throne* (^{<3013>}Zechariah 6:13), a priest with a crown. These two God has joined, and we must not think to separate them.

^{<0280>}EXODUS 28:40-43

ATTIRE OF THE PRIESTS

We have here,

1. Particular orders about the vestments of the inferior priests. They were to have coats, and girdles, and bonnets, of the same materials with those of the high priest; but there was a difference in shape between their bonnets and his mitre. Theirs, as his, were to be *for glory and beauty* (v. 40), that they might look great in their ministration: yet all this glory was nothing

compared with the glory of grace, this beauty nothing to the beauty of holiness, of which these holy garments were typical. They are particularly ordered, in their ministration, to wear *linen breeches*, v. 42. This teaches us modesty and decency of garb and gesture at all times, especially in public worship, in which a veil is becoming, ^{<415>}1 Corinthians 11:5, 6, 10. It also intimates what need our souls have of a covering, when we come before God, that the *shame of their nakedness may not appear*.

2. A general rule concerning the garments both of the high priest and of the inferior priests, that they were to be put upon them, at first, when they were consecrated, in token of their being invested in the office (v. 41), and then they were to wear them in all their ministrations, but not at other times (v. 43), and this at their peril, lest they *bear iniquity and die*. Those who are guilty of omissions in duty, as well as omissions of duty, shall *bear their iniquity*. If the priests perform the instituted service, and do not do it in the appointed garments, it is (say the Jewish doctors) as if a stranger did it, and the *stranger that comes nigh shall be put to death*. Nor will God connive at the presumptions and irreverences even of those whom he causes to draw most near to him; if Aaron himself put a slight upon the divine institution, he shall bear iniquity, and die. To us these garments typify,

(1.) The righteousness of Christ; if we appear not before God in this, we shall *bear iniquity and die*. What have we to do at the wedding-feast without a wedding-garment, or at God's altar without the array of his priests? ^{<422>}Matthew 22:12, 13.

(2.) *The armour of God* prescribed ^{<413>}Ephesians 6:13. If we venture without that armour, our spiritual enemies will be the death of our souls, and we shall bear the iniquity, our blood will be upon our own heads. Blessed is he therefore that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, ^{<415>}Revelation 16:15.

3. This is said to be a *statute for ever*, that is, it is to continue as long as the priesthood continues. But it is to have its perpetuity in the substance of which these things were the shadows.