

# Hednesford Pentecostal Church

## Priesthood

**Bible Version**

Unless otherwise stated all Bible references are taken from *The Holy Bible, New King James Version*. Thomas Nelson, Inc., Nashville, Tennessee. 1982.

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This study was given in a small group setting. The initial purpose was to study the garments of the Levitical priests and the role of Jesus as our Great High Priest. These subjects raised certain questions and as a result the additional subjects were discussed. They have been included here even though they strayed from the original intention.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

A very important title that Jesus possesses in *Great High Priest* and it is used by the writer of the Hebrews epistle.

Heb 4:14-16. Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. {15} For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathise with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. {16} Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

No where else is Scripture and about no one else is this title used.

In the book of Revelation we read about the priesthood of the New Testament believers.

Rev 1:5-6 ... To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, {6} and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

We believe that the priesthood of all believers is an important doctrine. In the Mosaic Covenant the priesthood was confined to a selected few. It is a measure of the power and effectiveness of Christ's sacrifice that all believers are now ordained as priests. For a church to insist that the priesthood belongs to a qualified or trained few lessens the effect of God's plan of redemption and reconciliation.

Being designated a priest is not an honouree or meaningless title which saints receive. It is a real calling that is full of meaning, authority and responsibility. As recipients of this privilege we have a God given purpose that we are called to fulfil. As priests we are of course subservient to the Great High Priest.

If we are going to understand what it means for Jesus to be the Great High Priest, and for us to be called priests, then we need to study the Old Testament Law and its descriptions of the priests and High Priest of the Mosaic order. This will describe to us what is required of us in terms of attitude, preparation, dedication, and performance.

The revelation of the priesthood within the Old Testament was progressive. Initially we see that every individual man offered his own sacrifices. We read of this with people such as Adam, Cain and Abel, Noah etc. He was a priest for himself.

Later at the first Passover we read that the head of the family acted as a priest for his household, sacrificing the Pascal lamb and applying the blood. He was a priest for his family.

Again later we read of the institution of the Aaronic priesthood. No longer could the head of the family offer a lamb, or apply the blood. There was now a priest for the nation.

In the New Testament there is only one sacrifice - the Lamb of God, and there is only one Great High Priest who handles the sacrifice and applies the blood. Jesus is the priest for the Church.

## 2. AARONIC PRIESTHOOD

### 2.1. CALLING

Firstly we see that God called Aaron and his sons to be priests. They are not self-appointed and neither did Moses choose them.

Exo 28:1-3. “Now take Aaron your brother, and his sons with him, from among the children of Israel, that he may minister to me as priest, Aaron and Aaron's sons: Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. {2} And you shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother, for glory and for beauty. {3} So you shall speak to all who are gifted artisans, whom I have filled with the spirit of wisdom, that they may make Aaron's garments, to consecrate him, that he may minister to Me as priest.”

Hebrews says:

Heb 5:4. And no man takes this honour to himself, but he who is called by God, just as Aaron was.

Paul writes of how we should respond to the calling we have received.

Eph 4:1-3. I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, {2} with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, {3} endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

In verse 1 of Exodus 28, the five men appear to be referred to as "he". This shows the interdependency between High Priest and the Priests. The High Priest could not minister without the priests, but neither could they fulfil the laws demands without the High Priest. They were all part of the same priesthood. Together they worshipped God and together they ministered the salvation of God. This is a type of how the Great High Priest ministers through and with the church - the priesthood of the New Testament.

The High Priest had to be covered with garments that made him beautiful and glorious. But the garments did not change the character of the various high priests that arose. Christ's glory and beauty are in His character, which is unchanging. Not only were the garments there to beautify Aaron, but also they were part of his consecration - setting apart for God.

The priest was to minister to God. He brought worship involving sacrifices, prayers and intercessions. He was to minister in the prescribed place in the prescribed way. Nothing was left to his own imagination or will.

### 2.2. CLEANSING

Exo 29:4. And Aaron and his sons you shall bring to the door of the tabernacle of meeting, and you shall wash them with water.

Before they could begin the candidates had to be publicly washed with water at the laver within the tabernacle.

Deliverance from sin was achieved through the sprinkling of the blood of a sacrifice. Preparation for ministry comes through the washing in water. In the New Testament this means the word of God.

John 15:3. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.

Psa 119:9. How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to your word.

At his baptism Jesus was washed publicly.

### 2.3. CLOTHED

Exo 29:4-5. And Aaron and his sons you shall bring to the door of the tabernacle of meeting, and you shall wash them with water. {5} Then you shall take the garments, put the tunic on Aaron, and the robe of the ephod, the ephod, and the breastplate, and gird him with the intricately woven band of the ephod.

Having been called and cleansed, the priests now had to be clothed. We will later be looking at the various articles in detail. The New Testament tells us of the way in which we have to be clothed.

Rom 13:14. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfil its lusts.

Gal 3:27. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

Eph 4:21-24. if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: {22} that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, {23} and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, {24} and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.

Col 3:12-14. Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; {13} bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. {14} But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection.

After his baptism, Jesus was clothed in the Holy Spirit.

### 2.4. CONSECRATED

After being clothed the priests were consecrated, or set apart for the work that God required.

Exo 29:9. And you shall gird them with sashes, Aaron and his sons, and put the hats on them. The priesthood shall be theirs for a perpetual statute. So you shall consecrate Aaron and his sons.

In taking on the priesthood they were greatly privileged and blessed. But they also lost some of their individual rights. They became bond-slaves. The Levites did not have a portion of land of their own, the Lord was their portion.

Num 18:20. Then the LORD said to Aaron: "You shall have no inheritance in their land, nor shall you have any portion among them; I am your portion and your inheritance among the children of Israel.

For us to we have no lasting possession in this life. It all belongs to the Lord - but he shares all he has with us.

Heb 13:14. For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come.

We should remember that we are not free agents who can plan our lives in whatever way we desire. Jesus is to be Lord of our choices. He said this about himself:

John 6:38. For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.

We too are a sent people.

## 2.5. COMMISSIONED

When the preparation was finished, they were engaged in the work. The priest's work is described in Leviticus.

## 3. INTRODUCTION INTO THE HIGH PRIEST'S GARMENTS

The instructions concerning the garments worn by the priest is given in the book of Exodus. In Chapter 19 the people delivered from Egypt arrive at the "Mount of God", called Horeb (*Waste*) or Sinai (*a bush*).

Exo 19:1. In the third month after the children of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, on the same day, they came to the Wilderness of Sinai.

This is where Moses encountered God at the Burning Bush. God had brought the people of Israel here to make them into a nation; to give them a national identity (the people of God), to give them His laws and commandments (which were both religious, communal, dietary and to do with hygiene).

God's purpose was to dwell in the midst of his people. To do this a special Tabernacle was required, and much of the Book of Exodus is about the building and functionality of this Tabernacle. Before the Tabernacle was prepared, Moses pitched another tent *outside the camp*, where he met alone with God. Joshua, Moses servant, remained in this tent<sup>1</sup>.

The people of Israel would stay at Horeb for approximately 12 months<sup>2</sup>, whilst the Tabernacle and other articles were being prepared.

The highlight of the events at Horeb was the giving of the law, written by the finger of God upon stone tablets. This happened, it is believed (Smith's Bible Dictionary), on the fiftieth day after the Passover - which would become the feast of Pentecost. This was the birthday of the nation. Years later it would be the birthday of the church, when God filled his people with his Spirit, living amongst them, and wrote his law on their hearts<sup>3</sup>.

These great events are marred by the tremendous transgression that took place concerning the Golden Calf. While Moses was away on the Mountain of God, the people rose up and asked Aaron to make them an idol to serve, breaking the very commandments that they had heard the voice of God speak from the mountain weeks before (Exodus 19 and 20).

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<sup>1</sup> Exo 33:7-11.

<sup>2</sup> Num 10:11-12. Now it came to pass on the twentieth day of the second month, in the second year, that the cloud was taken up from above the tabernacle of the Testimony. { 12 } And the children of Israel set out from the Wilderness of Sinai on their journeys; then the cloud settled down in the Wilderness of Paran.

<sup>3</sup> Jer 31:33

### 3.1. FREEWILL OFFERING

Exo 25:1-9. Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: {2} "Speak to the children of Israel, that they bring Me an offering. From everyone who gives it willingly with his heart you shall take My offering. {3} And this is the offering which you shall take from them: gold, silver, and bronze; {4} blue, purple, and scarlet thread, fine linen, and goats' hair; {5} ram skins dyed red, badger skins, and acacia wood; {6} oil for the light, and spices for the anointing oil and for the sweet incense; {7} onyx stones, and stones to be set in the ephod and in the breastplate. {8} And let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them. {9} According to all that I show you, that is, the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furnishings, just so you shall make it.

God had carried his people deep into the wasteland. They were miles from towns and trade routes. Where would they get the materials needed? How would these recently emancipated slaves afford these luxury items? The answer is that God had already provided.

Exo 3:21-22. "And I will give this people favour in the sight of the Egyptians; and it shall be, when you go, that you shall not go empty-handed. {22} But every woman shall ask of her neighbour, namely, of her who dwells near her house, articles of silver, articles of gold, and clothing; and you shall put them on your sons and on your daughters. So you shall plunder the Egyptians."

Exo 11:2-3. "Speak now in the hearing of the people, and let every man ask from his neighbour and every woman from her neighbour, articles of silver and articles of gold." {3} And the LORD gave the people favour in the sight of the Egyptians. Moreover the man Moses was very great in the land of Egypt, in the sight of Pharaoh's servants and in the sight of the people.

This plundering of the Egyptians has been described as "back pay" for the Hebrew slaves. But we see that God had prospered them for a purpose. It is a good habit to pray when we are blessed with financial gain or increase "Lord, for what purpose have you sent this? Show your servant what you want me to do with it?" God may have sent this as a provision for a current need or for a need that will appear in the future.

Now in Exodus 25 God tests the hearts of his people by asking them for a free will offering. No body had to give, they could keep what they had collected if they so wished. What no one would realise is that whatever they kept they would have to carry it for the next forty years, because there was no where to spend it. So if anyone had hardened their heart to the call to worship with their goods, then for the next forty years it would be a heavy load for them to bear.

The purpose of the offering was to bring the presence of God into the midst of the people, that God may dwell with them:

Exo 25:8. "And let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them.

For this offering God wanted the best, and asked for the best. Wasn't their deliverer worthy of the best? There are those people who resent spending serious money on God. They cannot understand how He would benefit from it, so they can't see the point. But there is a point. People always spend their money on the thing they worship the most; it reveals the motivation of the heart. Some people give God the scraps from their table. Is God glorified by the charity shop, second hand, left over mentality that some display?

Mal 1:6-8. "A son honours his father and a servant his master. If then I am the Father, where is my honour? And if I am a Master, where is my reverence? Says the LORD of hosts to you priests who despise my name. Yet you say, 'In what way have we despised your name?' {7} "You offer defiled food on my altar. But say, 'In what way have we defiled you?' By saying, 'The table of the LORD is contemptible.' {8} And when you offer the blind as a sacrifice, is it not evil? And when you offer the lame and sick, is it not evil? Offer it then to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you favourably?" Says the LORD of hosts.

God reads the heart. The widow's mite was not a lot, but it was an exciting, note worthy offering from God's perspective because the widow had put in everything she had. What does all this mean for a New Testament church which does not desire fine ornaments and shows of riches? Firstly we realise that the work is more important than the building. Budgets are set in terms of enabling the work of the kingdom, at home and abroad. But in terms of equipment and buildings, we want to honour God. We don't want thing to be shoddy and battered. But neither do we want to be wasteful. Our phrase might be excellence without extravagance.

Returning to Exodus the following is the account of the collection.

Exo 35:21-28. Then everyone came whose heart was stirred, and everyone whose spirit was willing, and they brought the Lord's offering for the work of the tabernacle of meeting, for all its service, and for the holy garments. {22} They came, both men and women, as many as had a willing heart, and brought earrings and nose rings, rings and necklaces, all jewellery of gold, that is, every man who made an offering of gold to the LORD. {23} And every man, with whom was found blue, purple, and scarlet thread, fine linen, and goats' hair, red skins of rams, and badger skins, brought them. {24} Everyone who offered an offering of silver or bronze brought the Lord's offering. And everyone with whom was found acacia wood for any work of the service, brought it. {25} All the women who were gifted artisans spun yarn with their hands, and brought what they had spun, of blue, purple, and scarlet, and fine linen. {26} And all the women whose heart stirred with wisdom spun yarn of goats' hair. {27} The rulers brought onyx stones, and the stones to be set in the ephod and in the breastplate, {28} and spices and oil for the light, for the anointing oil, and for the sweet incense.

### 3.2. IDENTICAL MATERIALS

Exo 25:3-9. And this is the offering which you shall take from them: gold, silver, and bronze; {4} blue, purple, and scarlet thread, fine linen, and goats' hair; {5} ram skins dyed red, badger skins, and acacia wood; {6} oil for the light, and spices for the anointing oil and for the sweet incense; {7} onyx stones, and stones to be set in the ephod and in the breastplate. {8} And let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them. {9} According to all that I show you, that is, the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furnishings, just so you shall make it.

The Tabernacle was to be erected so that God could dwell in the midst of his people. The priests' garments were made from the materials gathered and the High Priest's garments in particular were made from the same materials as the Tabernacle.

He blended in and was in harmony with the place he would function. He shared in the glory and riches of the presence of God. When robed this man was one with his surroundings. This was achieved by the design laid down by God.

The garments were to be of excellent quality. Fine linen, pure gold and precious stones were all to be skilfully wrought together. The High Priest was to be dressed finer than any king.

### 3.3. DIFFERING GARMENTS

All the priests wore breeches, robes and a bonnet which were made out of the finest linen. These articles will be discussed in detail later on. They were to be worn within the courts of the Tabernacle as they went about the business of the sacrifices and offering made upon the altar.

The High Priest had additional cloths which were colourful and expensive and were for glory and beauty.

Exo 28:2. "And you shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother, for glory and for beauty.

However he was only to wear these garments within the holy place. When he was outside in the courts he was to wear only his pure line breeches and robe.

Exo 39:1. Of the blue, purple, and scarlet thread they made garments of ministry, for ministering in the holy place, and made the holy garments for Aaron, as the LORD had commanded Moses.

Exo 35:19. 'the garments of ministry, for ministering in the holy place; the holy garments for Aaron the priest and the garments of his sons, to minister as priests.'

Ezek 44:19. "When they go out to the outer court, to the outer court to the people, they shall take off their garments in which they have ministered, leave them in the holy chambers, and put on other garments; and in their holy garments they shall not sanctify the people.

This meant that only the other priests would ever see the High Priest in his splendid cloths. In like manner only the New Testament saints see Jesus in his glorious state. To those outside He appears like any other man.

It should be noted that on the one day in the year the High Priest went into the Most Holy Place, he had to take off his special garments.

Lev 16:2-4. and the LORD said to Moses: "Tell Aaron your brother not to come at just any time into the Holy Place inside the veil, before the mercy seat which is on the ark, lest he die; for I will appear in the cloud above the mercy seat. {3} "Thus Aaron shall come into the Holy Place: with the blood of a young bull as a sin offering, and of a ram as a burnt offering. {4} "He shall put the holy linen tunic and the linen trousers on his body; he shall be girded with a linen sash, and with the linen turban he shall be attired. These are holy garments. Therefore he shall wash his body in water, and put them on.

### 3.4. HIDDEN MEANINGS

When we look at the individual articles of the priests garments we shall notice that there were specific instructions for how things were made and what materials were used. Many, if not all, of these details are illustrations or have are meanings. The garments tell a story.

Care is needed when we consider what the various articles, materials and colours represent. Numerous commentators have suggested differing meanings.

Therefore we need to understand the following:

- Some of the articles may have God given hidden meanings. The physical item is designed to illustrate a spiritual truth.
- We can all meditate upon the various articles and be reminded of some spiritual truth such as an aspect of Jesus or his ministry. This is valid meditation which leads us to Jesus, but it does not mean that what we thought about is necessarily the sole spiritual truth that God intended. Someone else could meditate upon another spiritual truth.

## 4. THE HOLY GARMENTS OF THE PRIESTS

In this section we will consider the garments worn by the priests. The High Priest would also wear these garments outside the Holy Place or inside the Most Holy Place.

Exo 28:39-43. "You shall skilfully weave the tunic of fine linen thread, you shall make the turban of fine linen, and you shall make the sash of woven work. {40} For Aaron's sons you shall make tunics, and you shall make sashes for them. And you shall make hats for them, for glory and beauty. {41} So you shall put them on Aaron your brother and on his sons with him. You shall anoint them, consecrate them, and sanctify them, that they may minister to Me as priests. {42} And you shall make for them linen trousers to cover their nakedness; they shall reach from the waist to the thighs. {43} They shall be on Aaron and on his sons when they come into the tabernacle of meeting, or when they come near the altar to minister in the holy place, that they do not incur iniquity and die. It shall be a statute forever to him and his descendants after him.

Exo 39:27-29. They made tunics, artistically woven of fine linen, for Aaron and his sons, {28} a turban of fine linen, exquisite hats of fine linen, short trousers of fine woven linen, {29} and a sash of fine woven linen with blue, purple, and scarlet thread, made by a weaver, as the LORD had commanded Moses.

All the garments of the priests, except the sash, were made from fine white linen. In comparison to the High Priest's garments these must have seemed a little drab. The Sash did give a colourful break to the all white uniform.

### 4.1. FINE LINEN

The garments of the priests were all made from fine Egyptian linen. The quality of this linen was renown and widely exported. The texture of the linen is thought to have been equivalent to silk. There was nothing in the garments that would cause the priests to sweat. None of the garments were made from wool. In the visions of a future temple, Ezekiel received the following inhibition.

Ezek 44:17. "And it shall be, whenever they enter the gates of the inner court, that they shall put on linen garments; no wool shall come upon them while they minister within the gates of the inner court or within the house.

The fine linen signified purity. It is believed that this linen would have been bleached pure white. Righteousness was the foundational garment of the High Priest, where as it is the only garment of the priests. Jesus, the Great High Priest is altogether righteous and pure. His holiness was the foundation upon which everything he did was build. Because of his right-standing with God he was heard when he prayed; he had delegated authority over sickness, disease and the demonic; he was accepted as the Lamb of God without spot or blemish. For the New Testament saints we are bearers of Christ's righteousness. It has been imputed to us who were sinners, and it remains the only dress we can wear before God. We don't cover Christ's righteousness with our own works or merits.

It is said of the Messiah:

Isa 11:4-5. But with righteousness He shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked. {5} Righteousness shall be the belt of His loins, and faithfulness the belt of His waist.

The same clothing is seen in many prophetic visions of saints and angels.

Dan 11:35. "And some of those of understanding shall fall, to refine them, purify them, and make them white...

Dan 12:9-10. And he said, "Go your way, Daniel, for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end. {10} Many shall be purified, made white, and refined, but the wicked shall do wickedly; and none of the wicked shall understand, but the wise shall understand.

Luke 9:29. As He prayed, the appearance of His face was altered, and His robe became white and glistening.

John 20:12. And she saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain.

Acts 1:10-11. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, {11} who also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven."

Rev 3:4-5. "You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. {5} "He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.

Rev 3:18. "I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see.

Rev 4:4. Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and on the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white robes; and they had crowns of gold on their heads.

Rev 6:11. Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed.

Rev 7:9. After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands,

Rev 7:14. And I said to him, "Sir, you know." So he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

Rev 19:14. And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses.

#### 4.1.1. Mixed Materials

We have seen that all the priest's garments were made from the linen. The Law stated that none of the Israelites were to make a garment from mixed materials, such as wool and linen. This inhibition is stated with other laws forbidden mixing.

Lev 19:19. 'You shall keep My statutes. You shall not let your livestock breed with another kind. You shall not sow your field with mixed seed. Nor shall a garment of mixed linen and wool come upon you.

Some of these restrictions may have been for practical reasons; others may only have been symbolic. The people of God were to separate themselves from the nations around them and their practises. As New Testament saints we equally need to separate ourselves from sin and defilement.

Deut 22:9-11. "You shall not sow your vineyard with different kinds of seed, lest the yield of the seed which you have sown and the fruit of your vineyard be defiled. {10} You shall not plough with an ox and a donkey together. {11} You shall not wear a garment of different sorts, such as wool and linen mixed together.

We can use these restrictions to illustrate some New Testament truths. With regard to the mixing of seeds we could say that we are not to mix the word of God with other doctrines. With regard to the mixing of plough animals we could say that salvation is through faith alone, not a mixture of faith and works. We could use the mixing of materials within a garment to illustrate that we are not to mix holy and unholy practices in our lives, but have to a separate lifestyle.

#### 4.2. SKILFULLY AND ARTISTICALLY WOVEN

It is believed by commentators that the Hebrew words which describe the garments as being skilfully and artistically woven have the same idea as modern day damask. The linen did not have a pattern embroidered on to, but rather into the material. From a distance the material may have looked plain, but upon close inspection its worth and beauty would be evident. The pattern was diamond or chess-board.

The saint knows that imputed righteousness demands changes. The convicting power of the Holy Spirit is like needle work, goading us on, warning us and working through our salvation.

#### 4.3. TUNIC OR ROBE

The Hebrew for tunic is *Kethoneth* and it's root meaning is "to cover" or "to hide". It is the same word used in Gen 3:21 for the tunics that God made Adam and Eve. For the saint too, we need God to provide a covering to hide our sin and shame.

The tunic was a single piece of material, woven as a whole and was seamless. This symbolised spiritual and moral integrity. Jesus wore a seamless garment:<sup>4</sup>

#### 4.4. SASH

For the priests the sash (or girdle) was the only article that was coloured. It was woven from the blue, purple and scarlet thread used in the High Priest's garments. No gold was used. We will consider the colours when we look at the High Priest's garments. The purpose of the sash was to hold the tunic together and in place, like a belt it encircled the priest's body. This ensured that the

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<sup>4</sup> John 19:23-24.

covering was prevented from coming apart. We are reminded of the following New Testament exhortations.

Eph 6:14. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness,

1 Pet 1:13. Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ;

### 4.5. HAT

The linen hat was thought to represent an opening flower which signified life.

### 4.6. TROUSERS

The linen trousers were necessary so that the priests' nakedness would not be revealed as he walked around the tabernacle, and particularly as he climbed up to the altar.

Exo 28:42-43. "And you shall make for them linen trousers to cover their nakedness; they shall reach from the waist to the thighs. {43} "They shall be on Aaron and on his sons when they come into the tabernacle of meeting, or when they come near the altar to minister in the holy place, that they do not incur iniquity and die. It shall be a statute forever to him and his descendants after him.

The trousers therefore protected the priest. Without the garments these men would be aliens in this holy environment, and would perish because of their sinful nature.

Although other nations did wear trousers or breeches, it was unusual among the Hebrews. Some commentators believe that this undergarment was a double apron, preventing exposure should the tunic part.

### 4.7. FOOTWEAR

The priests were to perform their duties bare footed. They were to wash their feet as they entered the tabernacle.

Exo 40:30-32. He set the laver between the tabernacle of meeting and the altar, and put water there for washing; {31} and Moses, Aaron, and his sons would wash their hands and their feet with water from it. {32} Whenever they went into the tabernacle of meeting, and when they came near the altar, they washed, as the LORD had commanded Moses.

The ground of the tabernacle was considered to be holy ground. The use of footwear would have defiled this.

Exo 3:5. Then He said, "Do not draw near this place. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground."

## 5. THE GARMENTS OF THE HIGH PRIEST

### 5.1. THE ROBE OF THE EPHOD

Exo 28:31-35. "You shall make the robe of the ephod all of blue. {32} "There shall be an opening for his head in the middle of it; it shall have a woven binding all around its opening, like the opening in a coat of mail, so that it does not tear. {33} And upon its hem you shall make pomegranates of blue, purple, and scarlet, all around its hem, and bells of gold between them all around: {34} a golden bell and a pomegranate, a golden bell and a pomegranate, upon the hem of the robe all around. {35} And it shall be upon Aaron when he ministers, and its sound will be heard when he goes into the holy place before the LORD and when he comes out, that he may not die.

Exo 39:22-26. He made the robe of the ephod of woven work, all of blue. {23} And there was an opening in the middle of the robe, like the opening in a coat of mail, with a woven binding all around the opening, so that it would not tear. {24} They made on the hem of the robe pomegranates of blue, purple, and scarlet, and of fine woven linen. {25} And they made bells of pure gold, and put the bells between the pomegranates on the hem of the robe all around between the pomegranates: {26} a bell and a pomegranate, a bell and a pomegranate, all around the hem of the robe to minister in, as the LORD had commanded Moses.

#### 5.1.1. Robe

The word for robe here is different to that used of the white linen tunic worn by all the priests. In that case the Hebrew word was *kethoneth* which has a root meaning is "to cover" or "to hide". The word used here is *maiyl* and it is used of the robes worn particularly by royalty (kings, princes and princesses) and was to dignify the bearer.

Aaron's robe was to dignify him in the office of High Priest. It is worn over the white linen tunic which signified righteousness. Aaron had no claim upon kingship, but there would come a Great High Priest of the order of Melchizedek who would also be king.

#### 5.1.2. The Material

Interestingly the text does not say what the material is made from, only that its colour is blue. There were a number of materials readily used by the people of the day - linen, wool, silk, camel's hair and goat's hair. It is believed that from previous Scriptures studies that this would not be wool and was most likely linen.

The omission of the material suggests that it was readily understood in that culture what *blue* referred to. For us it is the colour that has most significance in its symbolism.

#### 5.1.3. The Colour

Blue was the colour of many articles within the Tabernacle, the curtains, the veil, the door and the gate. The shade of blue was hyacinth blue.

There are a number of interpretations concerning what the colour blue signifies.

- **Grace**

It is significant that every piece of the furniture within the Tabernacle was draped in blue when it was in transit.

Num 4:5-9. "When the camp prepares to journey, Aaron and his sons shall come, and they shall take down the covering veil and cover the ark of the Testimony with it. {6} Then they shall put on it a covering of badger skins, and spread over that a cloth entirely of blue; and they shall insert its poles. {7} On the table of showbread they shall spread a blue cloth, and put on it the dishes, the pans, the bowls, and the pitchers for pouring; and the showbread shall be on it. {8} They shall spread over them a scarlet cloth, and cover the same with a covering of badger skins; and they shall insert its poles. {9} "And they shall take a blue cloth and cover the lampstand of the light, with its lamps, its wick-trimmers, its trays, and all its oil vessels, with which they service it.

The life of the people was protected from the presence of God by the priest's service and structure of the Tabernacle. During transit Israel was protected by the coverings over the articles, blue being the covering that was visible. For us today the thing that spares us is grace:

Eph 2:8-9. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, {9} not of works, lest anyone should boast.

Blue can therefore be thought to remind us of God's grace. The High Priest's foundation garment spoke of righteousness, the robe of the ephod now declares the grace of God. Jesus Christ, the Great High Priest was full of grace and truth<sup>5</sup>.

In the design of the High Priest's garments we see that:

Psa 85:10. Mercy and truth have met together; Righteousness and peace have kissed.

- **The Word / Commandments**

Blue reminds us of the word of God and His commandments.

Num 15:38-40. "Speak to the children of Israel: Tell them to make tassels on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and to put a blue thread in the tassels of the corners. {39} And you shall have the tassel, that you may look upon it and remember all the commandments of the LORD and do them, and that you may not follow the harlotry to which your own heart and your own eyes are inclined, {40} and that you may remember and do all My commandments, and be holy for your God.

Blue was the colour that the tassels on the corner of the Hebrew's garments and signified the commandments. When the ark was in transit its glory was hidden *within the word*. It is through the word that we behold His glory, learn His statutes and are transformed into His image.

- **Divinity**

Blue is the colour of the heavens in the day time. To some this speaks of divinity. The articles of divine service were obscured from view by the blue. In like manner God is in the heavens, beyond the sky and is obscured from our view. Our Great High Priest is the Heavenly Man, the one who came from glory and is now enthroned there.

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<sup>5</sup> John 1:14. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

#### 5.1.4. Untearable

Exo 28:31-35. "You shall make the robe of the ephod all of blue. {32} "There shall be an opening for his head in the middle of it; it shall have a woven binding all around its opening, like the opening in a coat of mail, so that it does not tear.

The robe was probably rectangular and sleeveless. Some suggest that after it was folded in half and then stitched up the two side edges, but leaving slits for the arms. The Scripture does not mention such stitching, and it would not be necessary because of Curious Girdle would keep the robe together.

In the centre of the rectangle a hole was made for the High Priest's head. A woven binding was provided about the hole, not only to ensure that it should not fray, but also to ensure that it could not be torn. In the three similes that we have looked at with regard to the colour blue, we notice that:

God's word is everlasting and cannot be destroyed by men<sup>6</sup>.

God's grace / mercy endures forever<sup>7</sup>.

The divinity of the Messiah is an eternal truth that men cannot destroy.

#### 5.1.5. Pomegranates and Bells

Exo 39:24-26. They made on the hem of the robe pomegranates of blue, purple, and scarlet, and of fine woven linen. {25} And they made bells of pure gold, and put the bells between the pomegranates on the hem of the robe all around between the pomegranates: {26} a bell and a pomegranate, a bell and a pomegranate, all around the hem of the robe to minister in, as the LORD had commanded Moses.

The only ornaments on the robe were about the hem and they were the pomegranates and bells.

The pomegranates were each made from blue, purple, and scarlet thread and fine woven linen. Pomegranates are full of seeds and speak of fruitfulness. They speak of the word of God as being sweet and pleasant spiritual food. If the blue robe resembled the heavens, then the pomegranates remind us of the earth below. Some have suggested that pomegranates were emblematic of peace, although there is no Scriptural precedent for such a claim. It is true however that the intercessions of the Great High Priest have made peace between God and man.

The bells served the practical purpose of informing the priests outside, that the High Priest was alive as he ministered within the Holy Place. They can be thought to symbolise hearing the still small voice of God as we are about His service, or the joy that is produced by serving Him.

The presence of the pomegranates between the bells ensured that the bells did not clash together and produce a discord. Paul reminds us how the lack of spiritual fruit, love in particular, renders us like clanging symbols.

1 Cor 13:1. Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal.

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<sup>6</sup> Psa 119:89. Forever, O LORD, Your word is settled in heaven.

<sup>7</sup> Psa 118:1. Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever.

The pomegranates and bells may remind the New Testament believer of the Fruit of the Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit, although there was no such parallel for the Old Testament saint.

## 5.2. THE EPHOD

Three of the garments worn by the High Priest were to be permanently connected together, such that they were one. These were the ephod, the girdle and the breastplate.

Exo 28:5-14. "They shall take the gold, blue, purple, and scarlet thread, and fine linen, {6} and they shall make the ephod of gold, blue, purple, and scarlet thread, and fine woven linen, artistically worked. {7} It shall have two shoulder straps joined at its two edges, and so it shall be joined together. {8} And the intricately woven band of the ephod, which is on it, shall be of the same workmanship, made of gold, blue, purple, and scarlet thread, and fine woven linen.

{9} Then you shall take two onyx stones and engrave on them the names of the sons of Israel: {10} six of their names on one stone, and six names on the other stone, in order of their birth. {11} With the work of an engraver in stone, like the engravings of a signet, you shall engrave the two stones with the names of the sons of Israel. You shall set them in settings of gold. {12} And you shall put the two stones on the shoulders of the ephod as memorial stones for the sons of Israel. So Aaron shall bear their names before the LORD on his two shoulders as a memorial. {13} You shall also make settings of gold, {14} and you shall make two chains of pure gold like braided cords, and fasten the braided chains to the settings.

Exo 39:2-7. He made the ephod of gold, blue, purple, and scarlet thread, and of fine woven linen. {3} And they beat the gold into thin sheets and cut it into threads, to work it in with the blue, purple, and scarlet thread and the fine linen, into artistic designs. {4} They made shoulder straps for it to couple it together; it was coupled together at its two edges. {5} And the intricately woven band of his ephod that was on it was of the same workmanship, woven of gold, blue, purple, and scarlet thread, and of fine woven linen, as the LORD had commanded Moses. {6} And they set onyx stones, enclosed in settings of gold; they were engraved, as signets are engraved, with the names of the sons of Israel. {7} He put them on the shoulders of the ephod as memorial stones for the sons of Israel, as the LORD had commanded Moses.

The word *ephod* is only used of this garment worn by the High Priest and a similar garment worn by priests in later years. David wore an ephod when he brought the ark into Jerusalem. The word is apparently of foreign extraction and carries no relevant root meaning.

The ephod was a vest type of garment, joined at the shoulders and held together by a girdle. It was made from the pure white linen we considered earlier. Into this fabric skilful artisans worked gold, blue, purple, and scarlet threads. It is these threads that hold great interest and significance for us. Blue, purple and scarlet are common colours used in the Tabernacle and High Priests garments and are mentioned twenty-six times in the book of Exodus, but always in the same order. We can conclude therefore that there is significance in this order. The addition of gold to these materials only happens in the High Priests garments, and not the veil or curtains of the Tabernacle.

## 5.2.1. The Colours

### 5.2.1.1. Gold

This was not golden coloured thread, but thin wires made from pure gold.

Exo 39:3. And they beat the gold into thin sheets and cut it into threads, to work it in with the blue, purple, and scarlet thread and the fine linen, into artistic designs.

Gold has always been considered exceptionally valuable by mankind. There are a number of reasons for this including:

- It's bright and attractive colour.
- It doesn't tarnish (oxidise) or age.
- It is virtually indestructible. Neither fire nor acid can harm it but instead they only refine it from impurities.
- It is extremely malleable. 28 grams (one ounce) can be beaten to cover about 17 square metres in gold leaf. This means it is easily and inexpensively formed.
- It is comparatively rare.
- It occurs naturally in a relative pure state.
- It is also one of the heaviest of all metals.

In the symbolic language of Scripture, gold is used as an emblem of the glory of the eternal Godhead, who does not change, age or tarnish. In wearing gold the High Priest symbolised one who would come, the Great High Priest who was the eternally God. His glory is undiminishing; He changes not. The fire of trials did not harm his divinity. John wrote:

John 1:14. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

Gold was used to overlay the furniture in the Most Holy Place and the Holy Place of the Tabernacle.

In Revelation we are told of the New Jerusalem,

Rev 21:18. The construction of its wall was of jasper; and the city was pure gold, like clear glass.

Now on earth gold is semi-transparent, a strong light can be shone through gold leaf. Gold that is absolutely pure is believed to be transparent like glass.

### 5.2.1.2. Blue

We have seen previously that blue signifies divinity, the word of God and God's grace. All three are characteristics of the Great High Priest.

The next colour in the sequence is purple, but we shall consider scarlet next for reasons that will become apparent.

### 5.2.1.3. Scarlet

This is the colour that was achieved by obtaining a dye from the bodies of female worms called *coccus ilicis*. In Hebrew the term is "worm red".

Scarlet or red is symbolic of the earth, the colour of which is red in Israel. The name Adam, who was taken from the ground, means *red ground*. In the High Priest's garments the scarlet symbolises the one who although divine "became man". Our Great High Priest is the Son of Man, the second Adam, who was starting a new race of people. To enter this race you must be born again.

#### 5.2.1.4. Purple

Purple is achieved by mixing blue and scarlet, and can be thought of as being the mediator between the two. The Great High Priest, Christ, is the mediator between God and man, who came to reconcile man to God.

Purple has long been associated with royalty and the one who is symbolised by the High Priest is truly the King of kings.

We see the materials of the ephod therefore speak of the deity, divinity, humanity, righteousness and mediatory role of Jesus Christ.

#### 5.2.2. The Girdle of the Ephod

Exo 28:8. And the intricately woven band of the ephod, which is on it, shall be of the same workmanship, made of gold, blue, purple, and scarlet thread, and fine woven linen.

A girdle or band appears to be a wrap that was used to tie the ephod closely to the High Priest so that he became one with it. The ephod was to be loose. The same materials were used to make this item as the ephod itself, as they were to be one.

#### 5.2.3. The Shoulder Pieces

The front and back pieces of the ephod were joined at the shoulders by two wide straps, made from the same material. On these straps two large precious stones were mounted in gold settings. Gold chains were also attached to these settings and these were used to secure the breastplate.

Exo 28:7. It shall have two shoulder straps joined at its two edges, and so it shall be joined together.

Exo 28:9-14. Then you shall take two onyx stones and engrave on them the names of the sons of Israel: {10} six of their names on one stone, and six names on the other stone, in order of their birth. {11} With the work of an engraver in stone, like the engravings of a signet, you shall engrave the two stones with the names of the sons of Israel. You shall set them in settings of gold. {12} And you shall put the two stones on the shoulders of the ephod as memorial stones for the sons of Israel. So Aaron shall bear their names before the LORD on his two shoulders as a memorial. {13} You shall also make settings of gold, {14} and you shall make two chains of pure gold like braided cords, and fasten the braided chains to the settings.

The High Priest was to bear the twelve sons of Israel before the presence of the Lord upon his shoulders. This is different from the order specified on the engraving of the breastplate which were the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. This was high priest's work load; his burden. The names were engraved in order of birth and were therefore: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Dan, Naphtali followed by Gad, Asher, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph and Benjamin on the second stone.

Our Great High Priest now lives to make intercession for the household of God.

### 5.3. THE BREASTPLATE

Exo 28:15-16. "You shall make the breastplate of judgment. Artistically woven according to the workmanship of the ephod you shall make it: of gold, blue, purple, and scarlet thread, and fine woven linen, you shall make it. {16} It shall be doubled into a square: a span shall be its length, and a span shall be its width.

The Hebrew word translated here as breastplate (or chest piece) is *choshen* and is only used of this article. It comes from an unused root and may mean to *contain* or to *sparkle*. The article would have sparkled, holding as it did twelve precious stones. It was also contained the Urim and Thummim. It might have been better called the *sparkling pocket*.

### 5.3.1. The Design of the Breastplate

The breastplate was made from a piece of fine linen which was approximately 50 cm by 25 cm. Like the ephod and girdle the cloth was decorated with gold, blue, purple and scarlet, having the same symbology discussed previously.

The cloth was then folded in half to make a square pocket, the fold being at the bottom. Gold rings at the corner of the square were used to attach it to the ephod.

Square is a shape that has significance in the design of the Tabernacle, and means equality, completeness or wholeness. The bronze altar used for the sacrifices was made square<sup>8</sup>. The golden altar used to burn incense was made square<sup>9</sup>. Within the Tabernacle the Holy of Holies was a cube of 10 cubits<sup>10</sup>. The New Jerusalem was measured to be a cube<sup>11</sup>.

### 5.3.2. The Attachment to the Ephod

Exo 28:22-28. "You shall make chains for the breastplate at the end, like braided cords of pure gold. {23} And you shall make two rings of gold for the breastplate, and put the two rings on the two ends of the breastplate. {24} Then you shall put the two braided chains of gold in the two rings which are on the ends of the breastplate; {25} and the other two ends of the two braided chains you shall fasten to the two settings, and put them on the shoulder straps of the ephod in the front. {26} You shall make two rings of gold, and put them on the two ends of the breastplate, on the edge of it, which is on the inner side of the ephod. {27} And two other rings of gold you shall make, and put them on the two shoulder straps, underneath the ephod toward its front, right at the seam above the intricately woven band of the ephod. {28} They shall bind the breastplate by means of its rings to the rings of the ephod, using a blue cord, so that it is above the intricately woven band of the ephod, and so that the breastplate does not come loose from the ephod.

The Breastplate was tied firmly to the ephod at its four corners. Braided gold was used to tie the upper corners to the two shoulder pieces of the ephod. Blue cord was used to tie the lower corners to gold rings set in the ephod just above the curious girdle.

Why use gold cords and blue cord? Why not use one or the other? If we consider that the Breastplate represents the Messiah, then He is tied to God above by the gold cords of his own divinity, and he is tied to man below by the blue cords symbolising grace.

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<sup>8</sup> Exo 27:1. "You shall make an altar of acacia wood, five cubits long and five cubits wide; the altar shall be square; and its height shall be three cubits.

<sup>9</sup> Exo 30:1-2. "You shall make an altar to burn incense on; you shall make it of acacia wood. {2} "A cubit shall be its length and a cubit its width; it shall be square; and two cubits shall be its height. Its horns shall be of one piece with it.

<sup>10</sup> In the Vulgate the Holy of holies is called the *sanctum sanctorum*.

<sup>11</sup> Rev 21:16. The city is laid out as a square; its length is as great as its breadth. And he measured the city with the reed: twelve thousand furlongs. Its length, breadth, and height are equal.

### 5.3.3. A Memorial Before the Lord

Exo 28:17-29. And you shall put settings of stones in it, four rows of stones: The first row shall be a sardius, a topaz, and an emerald; this shall be the first row; {18} the second row shall be a turquoise, a sapphire, and a diamond; {19} the third row, a jacinth, an agate, and an amethyst; {20} and the fourth row, a beryl, an onyx, and a jasper. They shall be set in gold settings. {21} And the stones shall have the names of the sons of Israel, twelve according to their names, like the engravings of a signet, each one with its own name; they shall be according to the twelve tribes...

{29} "So Aaron shall bear the names of the sons of Israel on the breastplate of judgment over his heart, when he goes into the holy place, as a memorial before the LORD continually.

On the outer face of the breastplate twelve precious stones were mounted in gold settings. Upon each of these stones a name of a tribe of Israel was engraved, these being representative of the whole nation. The Breastplate is therefore described as a *memorial*, the means by which God is reminded of the tribes of His nation. We might ask why would God need reminding, since he cannot forget anything. The memorial stones are representative of prayer of the High Priest.

Heb 7:25-26. Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. {26} For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens;

Each stone was different, just as each believer is a unique individual with differing characteristics and gifts. But each was precious and was placed against the heart of the High Priest. So our Great High Priest bears us all close to his bosom.

We saw that the two onyx stones upon the shoulders of the ephod had the names of the twelve sons of Jacob inscribed upon them. The twelve names on the breastplate were the twelve tribes of Israel. In this list Levi is not included and Joseph is replaced by his two sons Ephraim and Manasseh.

Levi does not appear because they had no earthly inheritance in the land, since the Lord was their inheritance.

Num 18:20-21. Then the LORD said to Aaron: "You shall have no inheritance in their land, nor shall you have any portion among them; I am your portion and your inheritance among the children of Israel. {21} "Behold, I have given the children of Levi all the tithes in Israel as an inheritance in return for the work which they perform, the work of the tabernacle of meeting.

In one sense they had a representation within the Tabernacle that none of the other tribes had, since the priests were all of the tribe of Levi.

Reuben had been Jacob's firstborn. In Genesis we read that Reuben had some fine qualities but his act of fornication with Bilhah, his father's concubine<sup>12</sup>, outweighed all these and became the thing that would define him<sup>13</sup>. As a result he lost his birthright.

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<sup>12</sup> Gen 35:22. And it happened, when Israel dwelt in that land, that Reuben went and lay with Bilhah his father's concubine; and Israel heard about it...

<sup>13</sup> Gen 49:3-4. "Reuben, you are my firstborn, My might and the beginning of my strength, The excellency of dignity and the excellency of power. {4} Unstable as water, you shall not excel, Because you went up to your father's bed; Then you defiled it; He went up to my couch.

Joseph received the honour of being the head of the family because of his work in being the Lord's deliverer. He therefore received the double-portion, Ephraim and Manasseh being numbered among Jacob's sons.

Gen 48:5-6. "And now your two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt, are mine; as Reuben and Simeon, they shall be mine. {6} "Your offspring whom you beget after them shall be yours; they will be called by the name of their brothers in their inheritance.

The Order of the names has also been altered from the order of birth. The order of the tribes was defined by God through Moses in Number chapter 2. The instruction given defines the order in which the tribes marched and the position in which they encamped around the Tabernacle. In that chapter four tribes were denoted as standard bearers, with two other tribes coming under that standard. The order and the associated precious stone is as follows:

Standard	Tribe	Encamped	Precious Stone
Judah	Judah	East	Sardius
	Issachar	East	Topaz
	Zebulan	East	Carbuncle
Reuben	Reuben	South	Emerald
	Simeon	South	Sapphire
	Gad	South	Diamond
Ephraim	Ephraim	West	Ligure
	Manasseh	West	Agate
	Benjamin	West	Amethyst
Dan	Dan	North	Beryl
	Asher	North	Onyx
	Naphtali	North	Jasper

It is correctly noted that Judah, which means *praise of Jehovah*, goes first. It does us all well to remember that praise brings the break through. Activating praise in spiritual warfare can take us from moaning, complaining and fear into thanksgiving and faith. When Judah faced certain annihilation through the invasion of the people of Ammon, Moab and Mount Seir, King Jehoshaphat and the people sought the Lord, received prophetic instruction and then arranged their army with the worshippers at the front.

2 Chr 20:20-22. So they rose early in the morning and went out into the Wilderness of Tekoa; and as they went out, Jehoshaphat stood and said, "Hear me, O Judah and you inhabitants of Jerusalem: Believe in the LORD your God and you shall be established; believe His prophets, and you shall prosper." {21} And when he had consulted with the people, he appointed those who should sing to the LORD, and who should praise the beauty of holiness, as they went out before the army and were saying: "Praise the LORD, for His mercy endures forever." {22} Now when they began to sing and to praise, the LORD set ambushes against the people of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir, who had come against Judah; and they were defeated.

It is of interest, although not directly relevant to this study, that a differing list of the tribes of Israel is used in the book of Revelation when 12,000 are sealed from each tribe.

Rev 7:4-8. And I heard the number of those who were sealed. One hundred and forty-four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel were sealed: {5} of the tribe of Judah twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Gad twelve thousand were sealed; {6} of the tribe of Asher twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand were sealed; {7} of the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Levi twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand were sealed; {8} of the tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Benjamin twelve thousand were sealed.

We notice that the order is different and also that Levi and Joseph are included. Dan however is excluded. It is not clear why Dan is not mentioned here. Some suggest that it is because of the gross idolatry that Dan committed so early in the Promised Land. In the restoration visions of Ezekiel (Ezek 48:1-5) Dan and Ephraim are both given designated portions.

A related study is the prophecies spoken by Jacob over his twelve sons (Gen 49) and spoken by Moses over the twelve tribes (Deut 33).

#### 5.3.4. Breastplate of Judgement

Exo 28:30. And you shall put in the breastplate of judgment the Urim and the Thummim, and they shall be over Aaron's heart when he goes in before the LORD. So Aaron shall bear the judgment of the children of Israel over his heart before the LORD continually.

Another function of the Breastplate was to hold the Urim and Thummim over Aaron's heart. Urim means *light* and Thummim means *perfection*. These articles were used to provide guidance to Israel, revealing to them the will of God and could only be used by the High Priest. They were useful in matters of judgement and direction. Scripture does not say exactly what they were or how they worked. One speculation is that they were both precious stones.

Joshua was instructed to work with the High Priest who would enquire for him using the Urim and Thummim.

Num 27:21. "He [Joshua] shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall inquire before the LORD for him by the judgment of the Urim. At his word they shall go out, and at his word they shall come in, he and all the children of Israel with him; all the congregation."

In discerning the sin and Achan, we can therefore expect that various selections were done using the ephod.

Josh 7:16-18. So Joshua rose early in the morning and brought Israel by their tribes, and the tribe of Judah was taken. {17} He brought the clan of Judah, and he took the family of the Zarhites; and he brought the family of the Zarhites man by man, and Zabdi was taken. {18} Then he brought his household man by man, and Achan the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, was taken.

It appears from this text that the Urim and Thummim simply gave a True / False, Yes / No type of answer. Some have suggested that one of the stones would vibrate. Others have suggested that one stone would go cloudy or shine with a light.

King David, although a prophet himself, enquired of the Lord using these devices.

1 Sam 23:9-12. When David knew that Saul plotted evil against him, he said to Abiathar the priest, "Bring the ephod here." {10} Then David said, "O LORD God of Israel, Your servant has certainly heard that Saul seeks to come to Keilah to destroy the city for my sake. {11} "Will the men of Keilah deliver me into his hand? Will Saul come down, as Your servant has heard? O LORD God of Israel, I pray, tell Your servant." And the LORD said, "He will come down." {12} Then David said, "Will the men of Keilah deliver me and my men into the hand of Saul?" And the LORD said, "They will deliver you."

1 Sam 30:7-8. Then David said to Abiathar the priest, Ahimelech's son, "Please bring the ephod here to me." And Abiathar brought the ephod to David. {8} So David inquired of the LORD, saying, "Shall I pursue this troop? Shall I overtake them?" And He answered him, "Pursue, for you shall surely overtake them and without fail recover all."

The answers given here are more complex than a simple yes or no.

For New Testament believers how these articles worked is not important. They can be thought to symbolise the way we are led through God's word and God's Spirit. Spiritual discernment is an issue of the heart rather than the head. To be effect in discerning God's will we have to be walking in the light and our way needs to be perfect before Him.

#### **5.4. THE TURBAN AND HOLY CROWN**

The final garments of the High Priest were upon his head. We have already seen that all the other priests were to ministers with a head covering made from the pure white linen. This hat was in the form of an opening flower.

The High Priest's head covering had the additional function of bearing the golden crown.

Exo 28:4. "And these are the garments which they shall make: a breastplate, an ephod, a robe, a skilfully woven tunic, a turban, and a sash. So they shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother and his sons, that he may minister to Me as priest.

Exo 28:39. "You shall skilfully weave the tunic of fine linen thread, you shall make the turban of fine linen, and you shall make the sash of woven work.

Exo 29:6. "You shall put the turban on his head, and put the holy crown on the turban.

The Hebrew word for turban is *mitsnepheth* where as the word for the priest's hat is *migbaah*, which is derived from a root word meaning to lift up. In Exodus 29 verse 6, referring to the turban, the word for *put* is the word for bind in the original. The turban was produced from a long piece of linen cloth wound around the head and fastened in the back. The priests' hat was a simple cap or bonnet.

It is clear that none of the priests were to function before the Lord without their head being covered. The pure white linen symbolizes righteousness and purity. The mind of every believer needs to be renewed and transformed in order that our service might be acceptable to the Lord. Our thought life is not a private world of our own, but is open to inspection and scrutiny from God.

Here are a few New Testament exhortations concerning the mind:

Rom 7:23. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.

Rom 8:7. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.

Rom 12:2. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Rom 14:5. ... Let each be fully convinced in his own mind.

Eph 4:22-24. that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, {23} and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, {24} and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.

Col 3:2. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.

2 Tim 1:7. For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.

1 Pet 1:13. Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ;

We could paraphrase Peter's exhortation to say "cloth your mind in readiness". A simple hat like the priest's can be placed simply on the head, but the turban of the High Priest would take time as the linen was wrapped around his head again and again. In the same way the believer must continually apply godly disciplines to his mind, wrapping his mind in the word of God. This takes time.

It is interesting to see that in the Old Testament a man would cover his head to pray. All Jewish men were taught to do this by the Rabbis, as a sign of submission to God. However Paul teaches the opposite in the New Testament.

1 Cor 11:4. Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonours his head.

There has been a dramatic change, the reason for which is not fully explained. Paul argument is that man is created in the image of God, and would dishonour God by covering his head.

Whereas the Old Testament was concerned with the symbolism of religious acts, traditions and articles, the New Testament is more concerned with worshipping God in spirit and in truth.

### 5.4.1. The Holy Crown

Exo 28:36-38. "You shall also make a plate of pure gold and engrave on it, like the engraving of a signet: HOLINESS TO THE LORD. {37} And you shall put it on a blue cord, that it may be on the turban; it shall be on the front of the turban. {38} So it shall be on Aaron's forehead, that Aaron may bear the iniquity of the holy things which the children of Israel hallow in all their holy gifts; and it shall always be on his forehead, that they may be accepted before the LORD.

Although the turban was plain white linen, it was adorned with a golden plate, which is called a crown. The Hebrew for crown is *nezer* and is translated as crown or consecration. This gold plate was positioned over the High Priest's forehead and tied with blue cord.

The imperfections of holy things were to be borne or taken away by Aaron through this plate. Our Great High Priest bore away all the imperfections and iniquity of those who come to God through him.

1 Pet 2:24. who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness; by whose stripes you were healed.

The inscription upon this plate was "Holiness to the Lord". This perfectly describes the life of Jesus, the Great High Priest. He was wholly dedicated and thoroughly sinless. This also describes the high calling that all believers receive. Peter says:

1 Pet 1:15-16. but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, {16} because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy."

2 Pet 3:11. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness,

The forehead signifies a person's will<sup>14</sup>. If someone is self-willed and stubborn their fore-heads are said to be like flint. If someone is determined it is said that they have set their forehead. As a priest unto our God, our will should be submitted to God and flexible.

In Zechariah's vision of the High Priest Joshua, it is this turban and crown that are significant.

Zech 3:1-7. Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the Angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to oppose him. {2} And the LORD said to Satan, "The LORD rebuke you, Satan! The LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is this not a brand plucked from the fire?" {3} Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and was standing before the Angel. {4} Then He answered and spoke to those who stood before Him, saying, "Take away the filthy garments from him." And to him He said, "See, I have removed your iniquity from you, and I will clothe you with rich robes."

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<sup>14</sup> Jer 3:3. Therefore the showers have been withheld, And there has been no latter rain. You have had a harlot's forehead; You refuse to be ashamed.

Ezek 3:8-9. "Behold, I have made your face strong against their faces, and your forehead strong against their foreheads. {9} "Like adamant stone, harder than flint, I have made your forehead; do not be afraid of them, nor be dismayed at their looks, though they are a rebellious house."

{5} And I said, "Let them put a clean turban on his head." So they put a clean turban on his head, and they put the clothes on him. And the Angel of the LORD stood by. {6} Then the Angel of the LORD admonished Joshua, saying, {7} "Thus says the LORD of hosts: 'If you will walk in My ways, and if you will keep My command, then you shall also judge My house, and likewise have charge of My courts; I will give you places to walk among these who stand here.

## 6. MELCHIZEDEK

### 6.1. THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE HIGH PRIEST

Heb 5:1-4. For every high priest taken from among men is appointed for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins. {2} He can have compassion on those who are ignorant and going astray, since he himself is also subject to weakness. {3} Because of this he is required as for the people, so also for himself, to offer sacrifices for sins. {4} And no man takes this honour to himself, but he who is called by God, just as Aaron was.

The qualifications for the office of the High Priest are described. Firstly he is taken from among men, so that he has the same nature as those he represents, and is therefore subject to the same weakness. He can therefore have compassion upon those he represents. Secondly he offers both gifts and sacrifices for sins (for the people and for himself). Thirdly he does not choose himself, but is called by God. The High Priest is God's representative to men, and man's representative before God. He is to offer prayer, intercession, praise, worship, gifts and sacrifices to God. He is to give God's law, judgement, discernment, instruction and blessing to the people. The High Priest is the mediator between God and man.

Heb 5:5-10. So also Christ did not glorify Himself to become High Priest, but it was He who said to Him: "You are My Son, Today I have begotten You." {6} As He also says in another place: "You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek"; {7} who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, {8} though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. {9} And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him, {10} called by God as High Priest "according to the order of Melchizedek,"

Jesus perfectly fulfils the requirements of the High Priest.

Firstly He was called by God as 'a priest forever...of the order of Melchizedek'. The writer is quoting Psalm 110. This is a Messianic Psalm, one which Jesus himself quoted.

Psa 110. The LORD said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool." {2} The LORD shall send the rod of Your strength out of Zion. Rule in the midst of Your enemies! {3} Your people shall be volunteers in the day of Your power; in the beauties of holiness, from the womb of the morning, You have the dew of Your youth. {4} The LORD has sworn and will not relent, "You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek." {5} The Lord is at Your right hand; He shall execute kings in the day of His wrath. {6} He shall judge among the nations, He shall fill the places with dead bodies; He shall execute the heads of many countries. {7} He shall drink of the brook by the wayside; therefore He shall lift up the head.

The latter part of this psalm is difficult for New Testament believers to appreciate. These verses refer to “the day of His wrath” also known as the day of vengeance. Old Testament prophets, such as John the Baptist, were much more comfortable with the judgement message.

In verse one, Yahweh (the God of the universe) speaks to Adonai (the Messiah). Jesus asked the scribes who the Messiah could be the son of David when David in this psalm refers to him as Lord (Mark 12:35-37).

It is verse four that the writer of Hebrews applies in his argument. Jesus, The Messiah is a priest forever of the order of Melchizedek.

Jesus fulfils the second requirement by being a partaker of the nature of the flesh of those he represents.

Both in his earthly life and now in heaven Jesus fulfils the third requirement in that He offers up prayers and supplications<sup>15</sup>. The sacrifice that this priest made was not bulls, goats and lambs, but himself. Indeed he was perfected in His role as High Priest by the things He obediently suffered, and became the author of eternal salvation who follow His example of obedience.

## 6.2. THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK

The author of Hebrews now leaves the subject of Melchizedek until the end of chapter six.

Heb 6:19-20. This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil, {20} where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.

But who was Melchizedek. He was a character we read about in Genesis who met with Abram (later to be Abraham) after he returned from fighting with the invading kings who had taken his nephew Lot captive.

Gen 14:18-20. Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was the priest of God Most High. {19} And he blessed him and said: "Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; {20} And blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand." And he gave him a tithe of all.

The author now reviews the attributes of Melchizedek, so as to describe the ministry of Christ, the High Priest.

Heb 7:1-3. For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, {2} to whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all, first being translated "king of righteousness," and then also king of Salem, meaning "king of peace," {3} without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, remains a priest continually.

Firstly the name Melchizedek means 'king of righteousness'. Secondly he is the king of Salem which means 'king of peace'. Thirdly we are told that he is priest of the Most High God. These three titles now apply to the Messiah.

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<sup>15</sup> Heb 7:25. Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.

Psalm 110 said that the Messiah is priest forever, that is, he has an unchanging priesthood. This is illustrated in Genesis by the fact that no mention is made of Melchizedek's genealogy, birth or death. This does not mean that Melchizedek was not born or did not die. Some have suggested that this was an appearance of Christ, or a Christophany, but the Messiah is said to be of the order of Melchizedek, not Melchizedek himself. Christ is greater than Melchizedek in that he offered up himself.

Heb 7:4.            Now consider how great this man was, to whom even the patriarch Abraham gave a tenth of the spoils.

Little is recorded in Scripture about this great man of God, but presumably plenty was written in God's books. Although Melchizedek is not a large character in Scripture, since he is not an ancestor of the Messiah, his spiritual importance is illustrated in that Abraham gave a tenth of his possessions to him. Melchizedek, the greater, then blessed Abraham, the junior. These facts illustrate that this priesthood is greater than the Levitical priesthood.

### 6.3. THE LEVITICAL ORDER

The author of Hebrews now illustrates how the Levitical priesthood is a temporary institution, like the law, introduced until the superior covenant would be revealed. This New Covenant would require a new priesthood.

Perfection could not be obtained through the old Levitical priesthood, or else God would not have sought to replace it. But the Levitical priesthood was imperfect, just as the sacrifices of bulls and goats were imperfect. These were all types and shadows of the perfect which was to be revealed.

Heb 7:5-17.        And indeed those who are of the sons of Levi, who receive the priesthood, have a commandment to receive tithes from the people according to the law, that is, from their brethren, though they have come from the loins of Abraham; {6} but he whose genealogy is not derived from them received tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. {7} Now beyond all contradiction the lesser is blessed by the better. {8} Here mortal men receive tithes, but there he receives them, of whom it is witnessed that he lives. {9} Even Levi, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, so to speak, {10} for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him.

{11} Therefore, if perfection were through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need was there that another priest should rise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be called according to the order of Aaron? {12} For the priesthood being changed, of necessity there is also a change of the law. {13} For He of whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no man has officiated at the altar. {14} For it is evident that our Lord arose from Judah, of which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood. {15} And it is yet far more evident if, in the likeness of Melchizedek, there arises another priest {16} who has come, not according to the law of a fleshly commandment, but according to the power of an endless life. {17} For He testifies: "You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek."

The new priesthood and the new law, which are unchanging, bring a better hope through which we can draw near to God. Under the Levitical priesthood, men could not draw near to God but had to remain outside the veil. Even after death, they could not enter the presence of God, but waited in Paradise until the Lamb of God made a way.

One of the imperfections of the Levitical priesthood was that the priests themselves were subject to death, but the Messiah has an unchanging priesthood because He lives forever. He therefore offers an unfailing and undying intercession for His people.

Heb 7:18-25. For on the one hand there is an annulling of the former commandment because of its weakness and unprofitableness, {19} for the law made nothing perfect; on the other hand, there is the bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God. {20} And inasmuch as He was not made priest without an oath {21} (for they have become priests without an oath, but He with an oath by Him who said to Him: "The LORD has sworn and will not relent, 'You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek'"), {22} by so much more Jesus has become a surety of a better covenant. {23} Also there were many priests, because they were prevented by death from continuing. {24} But He, because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood. {25} Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.

Christ's priesthood is superior in that it was made through an oath of God, and that its continuity is not hindered by death. This perfect priest is able to utterly save those who seek to approach God.

Heb 7:26-28. For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens; {27} who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people's, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself. {28} For the law appoints as high priests men who have weakness, but the word of the oath, which came after the law, appoints the Son who has been perfected forever.

This High Priest meets the need of mankind, since He does not suffer the imperfections of a sinful nature, He is situated in the highest of the heavens, He has offered the perfect sacrifice and He is the Son who has been perfected forever.

#### **6.4. THE PRIESTHOOD OF CHRIST**

Heb 8:1-6. Now this is the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, {2} a minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man. {3} For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices. Therefore it is necessary that this One also have something to offer. {4} For if He were on earth, He would not be a priest, since there are priests who offer the gifts according to the law; {5} who serve the copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. For He said, "See that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain." {6} But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises.

Having described the qualifications and calling of Jesus as the High Priest, the writer now states that the most important thing to realise is that WE have a High Priest who is the minister of the true tabernacle in heaven.

This is not just technically interesting, but it is practically important to each one of us. We are not alone, we are not disinherited; but our needs are described in spiritual petitions offered by a High

Priest who is seated at the Father's right hand. Our representative sees the Father face to face; there is no veil, no separation and no barrier.

The place where Jesus serves is far superior to the earthly tabernacle, which is just a representation of the heavenly. In the same manner the ministry of the heavenly High Priest is far superior to the earthly copies. He ministers through a better covenant with better promises. His ministry is not earth bound and is not tainted with human frailty and sin. His ministry is heavenly and divinely perfect.

The Old Testament was an inferior covenant. The New Testament has better promises, better sacrifices and achieved a better experience of forgiveness, acceptance and spiritual cleaning. Despite the inferiority of the Old Testament, nothing was left to the imagination of man in how they should approach God. Strict regulations were given as to how people were to worship and offer sacrifices. The constitution and the role of the priesthood was carefully defined. The articles of the tabernacle were designed in heaven, not by man. In order for God to be able to dwell in the midst of his people, the manner in which the people behaved in secular culture was also specified. No where in the people's relationship with God was anything left to the imagination or desire of man? The way was strictly prescribed by God.

Likewise the nature, make-up, governments and function of the New Testament church are not left to the imagination of men. We too need to build our lives according to the revealed pattern.

### 6.5. ATONEMENT

Heb 9:11-15. But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. {12} Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. {13} For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, {14} how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? {15} And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.

The sacrifices of the day of Atonement were supposed to bring reconciliation between God and Israel. Blood was presented as the proof of a life given. Christ presented his own blood and achieved at-one-ment for those who come to God through him. The believer can know the joy of having their conscience cleansed and their sins forgiven.

### 7. PRESUMPTION

Serving as a priest was a great honour, privilege and joy. It wasn't necessarily safe or without pain. The service of the priests was meticulously prescribed and had to be adhered to exactly. Variations from the Law could be fatal. The office of the priesthood also set restrictions upon them, such that they life was not their own. There was a cost to being a minister of the sanctuary.

For the disciple of Christ today we recognise that although there is little ritual in our service, there is still a spiritual right and acceptable way which must be adhered to. For example:

1 Cor 13:1-3. Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. {2} And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. {3} And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.

We also recognise that there is a cost in following Christ. Choices are denied, rights are surrendered and sacrifices made. Nevertheless it is still a great privilege and a honour and joy that we are called servants of Christ.

There are two notable occasions in Scripture where the carefully prescribed way for the Levitical priesthood was neglected and the result was disaster.

### 7.1. NADAB AND ABIHU

Aaron's two eldest sons were called to be priests and serve along side their father. They were set apart in an elaborate ceremony (Lev 8), where they had the blood of the sacrifice placed on them and they were sprinkled with the anointing oil. This elevated them to a senior position within Israel.

Exo 24:1. Now He said to Moses, "Come up to the LORD, you and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and worship from afar.

Exo 24:9-11. Then Moses went up, also Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, {10} and they saw the God of Israel. And there was under His feet as it were a paved work of sapphire stone, and it was like the very heavens in its clarity. {11} But on the nobles of the children of Israel He did not lay His hand. So they saw God, and they ate and drank.

But on the very first day of their official duties in the service of the Tabernacle, disaster struck. The day started well with everything being done according to the prescribed manner and as a result the glory of the Lord appeared to the people.

Lev 9:22-24. Then Aaron lifted his hand toward the people, blessed them, and came down from offering the sin offering, the burnt offering, and peace offerings. {23} And Moses and Aaron went into the tabernacle of meeting, and came out and blessed the people. Then the glory of the LORD appeared to all the people, {24} and fire came out from before the LORD and consumed the burnt offering and the fat on the altar. When all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces.

It is my conjecture that the glory of the Lord, that was visible to all the people, was the pillar of cloud standing over the tabernacle. This is the first of the five occasions in the Old Testament when fire came from God and consumed a prepared sacrifice<sup>16</sup>. This signified that God was well pleased with the offering.

There is then one New Testament occasion when fire came down upon a sacrifice:

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<sup>16</sup> The other occasions are: Gideon (Judg 6:19-21), Elijah (1 Ki 18:36-39), David (1 Chr 21:25-27) and Solomon (2 Chr 7:1-3).

Acts 2:1-4. When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. {2} And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. {3} Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. {4} And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

It was the task of the priests to ensure that the fire on the altar would never go out, but burn perpetually. It could be thought that all the sacrifices offered on the altar in years to come would be consumed by the fire that had been originally sent from God. This fire was not to be allowed to die out and a man made fire started to replace it.

The shout that the people made was a cry of joy (Hebrew verb – *ranan*) rather than an exclamation of fear.

It was at this historic high point that Nadab and Abihu presumed to enter the Holy of holies.

Lev 10:1-3. Then Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it, put incense on it, and offered profane fire before the LORD, which He had not commanded them. {2} So fire went out from the LORD and devoured them, and they died before the LORD. {3} And Moses said to Aaron, "This is what the LORD spoke, saying: 'By those who come near Me I must be regarded as holy; and before all the people I must be glorified.' " So Aaron held his peace.

In the jubilant worship encounter, these two men took upon themselves to burn incense before the presence of the Lord, in an un-prescribed manner and which *He had not commanded*. But men can never presume to approach God in a way that they choose. God is holy and is to be feared and respected. No man has a right to enter into His presence; no man can demand an audience with the King of kings. But God in his grace has made a way whereby men may approach him, but there is only one way. Those who trust they can approach God without coming in repentance and humility through Jesus, past Calvary, will perish like Nadab and Abihu.

The word here translated as “profane” is in the Hebrew *zuwr* which means “strange”. This offering is inappropriate and alien. According to the law concerning the Day of Atonement<sup>17</sup> the High Priest alone should enter the Most Holy Place, with fire in his censer which had been taken of the altar, from the perpetual fire. It may be that the fire Nadab and Abihu used was not taken there.

Their death was a direct consequence of their own actions. Their fine priestly garments, being cleansed with the blood of the sacrifices or being anointed with holy oil could not save them.

In verse three Moses warns Aaron not to react negatively or rebel against God’s righteous judgement. Aaron held his peace although his heart must have been breaking. He may later have realised how lightly he had escaped his own folly when he made the Golden Calf.

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<sup>17</sup> Lev 16:12 "Then he shall take a censer full of burning coals of fire from the altar before the LORD, with his hands full of sweet incense beaten fine, and bring it inside the veil.

Lev 10:4-7. And Moses called Mishael and Elzaphan, the sons of Uzziel the uncle of Aaron, and said to them, "Come near, carry your brethren from before the sanctuary out of the camp." {5} So they went near and carried them by their tunics out of the camp, as Moses had said. {6} And Moses said to Aaron, and to Eleazar and Ithamar, his sons, "Do not uncover your heads nor tear your clothes, lest you die, and wrath come upon all the people. But let your brethren, the whole house of Israel, bewail the burning which the LORD has kindled. {7} "You shall not go out from the door of the tabernacle of meeting, lest you die, for the anointing oil of the LORD is upon you." And they did according to the word of Moses.

According to the law of the priesthood<sup>18</sup> the High Priest was not allow to attend any funerals, not even of his father and mother. The law for the other priests was slightly less stringent<sup>19</sup>.

## 7.2. DAVID & UZZAH

Another occasion when man's presumption and neglect of God's commandments resulted in death is found in Second Samuel. Understanding of the tabernacle design and the law of the priesthood seems to have been lost over the preceding years. The great bronze altar, so necessary in approaching the Holy Place, was no longer kept with the Ark of the Covenant.

David in his godly ambition wished to bring the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem. He saw this as a great occasion and gathered all his great warriors, but he did not enquire of the priesthood, or read the law.

2 Sam 6:1-5. Again David gathered all the choice men of Israel, thirty thousand. {2} And David arose and went with all the people who were with him from Baale Judah to bring up from there the ark of God, whose name is called by the Name, the LORD of Hosts, who dwells between the cherubim.

{3} So they set the ark of God on a new cart, and brought it out of the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill; and Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, drove the new cart. {4} And they brought it out of the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill, accompanying the ark of God; and Ahio went before the ark. {5} Then David and all the house of Israel played music before the LORD on all kinds of instruments of fir wood, on harps, on stringed instruments, on tambourines, on sistrums, and on cymbals.

The first people who placed the ark on a cart where the Philistines in 1 Sam 6. David bought a new cart, but his generosity could not replace God's commandments. The ark was to be carried by poles and only by the Levites.

Exo 25:14. "You shall put the poles into the rings on the sides of the ark, that the ark may be carried by them.

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<sup>18</sup> Lev 21:10-12 'He who is the high priest among his brethren, on whose head the anointing oil was poured and who is consecrated to wear the garments, shall not uncover his head nor tear his clothes; {11} 'nor shall he go near any dead body, nor defile himself for his father or his mother; {12} 'nor shall he go out of the sanctuary, nor profane the sanctuary of his God; for the consecration of the anointing oil of his God is upon him: I am the LORD.

<sup>19</sup> Lev 21:1-4 And the LORD said to Moses, "Speak to the priests, the sons of Aaron, and say to them: 'None shall defile himself for the dead among his people, {2} 'except for his relatives who are nearest to him: his mother, his father, his son, his daughter, and his brother; {3} 'also his virgin sister who is near to him, who has had no husband, for her he may defile himself. {4} 'Otherwise he shall not defile himself, being a chief man among his people, to profane himself.

Num 3:30-31. And the leader of the fathers' house of the families of the Kohathites was Elizaphan the son of Uzziel. {31} Their duty included the ark, the table, the lampstand, the altars, the utensils of the sanctuary with which they ministered, the screen, and all the work relating to them.

After the Ark had been recovered from the Philistines it had be kept at the house of Abinadab.

2 Sam 6:6-9. And when they came to Nachon's threshing floor, Uzzah put out his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen stumbled. {7} Then the anger of the LORD was aroused against Uzzah, and God struck him there for his error; and he died there by the ark of God. {8} And David became angry because of the Lord's outbreak against Uzzah; and he called the name of the place Perez Uzzah to this day. {9} David was afraid of the LORD that day; and he said, "How can the ark of the LORD come to me?"

The oxen stumbled at some uneven ground, and Uzzah reached out his hand to steady the ark. But this man was not a Levite and he was not a priest. He broke the law and died as a result. The Law was there to protect him.

David is both angry with God and fearful about having the ark come close to city. But Uzzah's death was all David's fault. He was later to learn his mistake.

2 Sam 6:10-12. So David would not move the ark of the LORD with him into the City of David; but David took it aside into the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite. {11} The ark of the LORD remained in the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite three months. And the LORD blessed Obed-Edom and all his household. {12} Now it was told King David, saying, "The LORD has blessed the house of Obed-Edom and all that belongs to him, because of the ark of God." So David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-Edom to the City of David with gladness.

Obed-Edom was a Levite of the family of Korah. He was called a Gittite because he came from the Levitical city of Gath Rimmon.

1 Chr 15:1-13. David built houses for himself in the City of David; and he prepared a place for the ark of God, and pitched a tent for it. {2} Then David said, "No one may carry the ark of God but the Levites, for the LORD has chosen them to carry the ark of God and to minister before Him forever." {3} And David gathered all Israel together at Jerusalem, to bring up the ark of the LORD to its place, which he had prepared for it.

{4} Then David assembled the children of Aaron and the Levites: {5} of the sons of Kohath, Uriel the chief, and one hundred and twenty of his brethren; {6} of the sons of Merari, Asaiah the chief, and two hundred and twenty of his brethren; {7} of the sons of Gershon, Joel the chief, and one hundred and thirty of his brethren; {8} of the sons of Elizaphan, Shemaiah the chief, and two hundred of his brethren; {9} of the sons of Hebron, Eliel the chief, and eighty of his brethren; {10} of the sons of Uzziel, Amminadab the chief, and one hundred and twelve of his brethren. {11} And David called for Zadok and Abiathar the priests, and for the Levites: for Uriel, Asaiah, Joel, Shemaiah, Eliel, and Amminadab.

{12} He said to them, "You are the heads of the fathers' houses of the Levites; sanctify yourselves, you and your brethren, that you may bring up the ark of the LORD God of Israel to the place I have prepared for it. {13} "For because you did not do it the first time, the LORD our God broke out against us, because we did not consult Him about the proper order."

1 Chr 15:14-15. So the priests and the Levites sanctified themselves to bring up the ark of the LORD God of Israel. {15} And the children of the Levites bore the ark of God on their shoulders, by its poles, as Moses had commanded according to the word of the LORD.

2 Sam 6:13-14. And so it was, when those bearing the ark of the LORD had gone six paces, that he sacrificed oxen and fatted sheep. {14} Then David danced before the LORD with all his might; and David was wearing a linen ephod.

## 8. THE FAMILY OF LEVI

In order to fully understand some of the subjects we are going to look at, it is necessary for us to know the divisions within the Levitical family.

### 8.1. THE CHOICE OF THE LEVITES

Exo 32:25-29. Now when Moses saw that the people were unrestrained (for Aaron had not restrained them, to their shame among their enemies), {26} then Moses stood in the entrance of the camp, and said, "Whoever is on the Lord's side; come to me." And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together to him. {27} And he said to them, "Thus says the LORD God of Israel: 'Let every man put his sword on his side, and go in and out from entrance to entrance throughout the camp, and let every man kill his brother, every man his companion, and every man his neighbour.'" {28} So the sons of Levi did according to the word of Moses. And about three thousand men of the people fell that day. {29} Then Moses said, "Consecrate yourselves today to the LORD, that He may bestow on you a blessing this day, for every man has opposed his son and his brother."

Whilst Moses was up the Mountain of God receiving the Ten Commandments, Aaron was leading the people exactly where they wanted to go. Despite having heard the trumpet of God and voice of the Lord thundering the commandments, the people now break those same commandments by building a golden calf, worshipping it and then engaging in a licentious party.

Having prayed that God would not respond by destroying the whole camp, Moses now comes down to deal with the sin. When he cries to the people "who is on the Lord's side?" it is the Levites who respond and are sent to kill those who are engaged in shameful practises – even if they are a family member or friend. As a result of their choice to separate themselves to God, God separates them unto himself.

Num 3:12-13. "Now behold, I Myself have taken the Levites from among the children of Israel instead of every firstborn who opens the womb among the children of Israel. Therefore the Levites shall be Mine, {13} because all the firstborn are Mine. On the day that I struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, I sanctified to Myself all the firstborn in Israel, both man and beast. They shall be Mine: I am the LORD."

Num 3:41. "And you shall take the Levites for Me; I am the LORD; instead of all the firstborn among the children of Israel, and the livestock of the Levites instead of all the firstborn among the livestock of the children of Israel."

In sparing the first born of the Israelites when the Egyptians were slain, God had purchased them for himself, which follows the principle of the First Fruits. The First Fruits were always to be offered to God and in doing so the whole harvest was deemed holy. Following the incident of the Golden Calf, the Levites replace the first born as the First Fruit offering.

## 8.2. THE GENEALOGY OF THE LEVITES

Special interest is given to the genealogy of the Levites with the Pentateuch because of their important position in the service of God.

Exo 6:16-25. These are the names of the sons of Levi according to their generations: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari. And the years of the life of Levi were one hundred and thirty-seven. {17} The sons of Gershon were Libni and Shimi according to their families. {18} And the sons of Kohath were Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel. And the years of the life of Kohath were one hundred and thirty-three. {19} The sons of Merari were Mahali and Mushi. These are the families of Levi according to their generations.

{20} Now Amram took for himself Jochebed, his father's sister, as wife; and she bore him Aaron and Moses. And the years of the life of Amram were one hundred and thirty-seven. {21} The sons of Izhar were Korah, Nepheg, and Zichri. {22} And the sons of Uzziel were Mishael, Elzaphan, and Zithri. {23} Aaron took to himself Elisheba, daughter of Amminadab, sister of Nahshon, as wife; and she bore him Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. {24} And the sons of Korah were Assir, Elkanah, and Abiasaph. These are the families of the Korahites. {25} Eleazar, Aaron's son, took for himself one of the daughters of Putiel as wife; and she bore him Phinehas. These are the heads of the fathers' houses of the Levites according to their families.

There were three sons born to Levi, and these would later form the family divisions. This section gives particular attention to the Kothatites. Moses and Aaron were sons and Amram, the son of Kothath. Aaron's wife, Elisheba was the daughter of a prince of Judah, Amminadab.

Mishael and Elzaphan, the sons of Uzziel, Aaron's cousins were the men who carried out the corpses of Nadab and Abihu.

Aaron's grandson Phinehas gets special mention because of his zeal for the Lord.

## 8.3. THE DIVISION OF THE LEVITES

In the following section the duties of the three divisions are allocated.

Num 3:17-39. These were the sons of Levi by their names: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari. {18} And these are the names of the sons of Gershon by their families: Libni and Shimei. {19} And the sons of Kohath by their families: Amram, Izehar, Hebron, and Uzziel. {20} And the sons of Merari by their families: Mahli and Mushi. These are the families of the Levites by their fathers' houses.

{21} From Gershon came the family of the Libnites and the family of the Shimites; these were the families of the Gershonites. {22} Those who were numbered, according to the number of all the males from a month old and above; of those who were numbered there were seven thousand five hundred. {23} The families of the Gershonites were to camp behind the tabernacle westward. {24} And the leader of the fathers' house of the Gershonites was Eliasaph the son of Lael. {25} **The duties of the children of Gershon in the tabernacle of meeting included the tabernacle, the tent with its covering, the screen for the door of the tabernacle of meeting, {26} the screen for the door of the court, the hangings of the court which are around the tabernacle and the altar, and their cords, according to all the work relating to them.**

{27} From Kohath came the family of the Amramites, the family of the Izharites, the family of the Hebronites, and the family of the Uzzielites; these were the families of the Kohathites. {28} According to the number of all the males, from a month old and above, there were eight thousand six hundred keeping charge of the sanctuary. {29} The families of the children of Kohath were to camp on the south side of the tabernacle. {30} And the leader of the fathers' house of the families of the Kohathites was Elizaphan the son of Uzziel. {31} **Their duty included the ark, the table, the lampstand, the altars, the utensils of the sanctuary with which they ministered, the screen, and all the work relating to them. {32} And Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest was to be chief over the leaders of the Levites, with oversight of those who kept charge of the sanctuary.**

{33} From Merari came the family of the Mahlites and the family of the Mushites; these were the families of Merari. {34} And those who were numbered, according to the number of all the males from a month old and above, were six thousand two hundred. {35} The leader of the fathers' house of the families of Merari was Zuriel the son of Abihail. These were to camp on the north side of the tabernacle. {36} **And the appointed duty of the children of Merari included the boards of the tabernacle, its bars, its pillars, its sockets, its utensils, all the work relating to them, {37} and the pillars of the court all around, with their sockets, their pegs, and their cords.**

{38} Moreover those who were to camp before the tabernacle on the east, before the tabernacle of meeting, were Moses, Aaron, and his sons, keeping charge of the sanctuary, to meet the needs of the children of Israel; but the outsider who came near was to be put to death. {39} All who were numbered of the Levites, whom Moses and Aaron numbered at the commandment of the LORD, by their families, all the males from a month old and above, were twenty-two thousand.

1 Chr 6:16-30. The sons of Levi were Gershon, Kohath, and Merari. {17} These are the names of the sons of Gershon: Libni and Shimei. {18} The sons of Kohath were Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel. {19} The sons of Merari were Mahli and Mushi. Now these are the families of the Levites according to their fathers: {20} Of Gershon were Libni his son, Jahath his son, Zimmah his son, {21} Joah his son, Iddo his son, Zerah his son, and Jeatherai his son. {22} The sons of Kohath were Amminadab his son, Korah his son, Assir his son, {23} Elkanah his son, Ebiasaph his son, Assir his son, {24} Tahath his son, Uriel his son, Uzziel his son, and Shaul his son. {25} The sons of Elkanah were Amasai and Ahimoth. {26} As for Elkanah, the sons of Elkanah were Zophai his son, Nahath his son, {27} Eliab his son, Jeroham his son, and Elkanah his son. {28} The sons of Samuel were Joel the firstborn, and Abijah the second. {29} The sons of Merari were Mahli, Libni his son, Shimei his son, Uzzah his son, {30} Shimea his son, Haggiah his son, and Asaiah his son.

#### 8.4. TEMPLE WORSHIP

In preparing for the temple worship David, following his initial disaster when transporting the ark, appointed the Levites for the service in the temple. He also introduced responsibilities for “*song in the house of the Lord.*”

1 Chr 6:31-47. Now these are the men whom David appointed over the service of song in the house of the LORD, after the ark came to rest. {32} They were ministering with music before the dwelling place of the tabernacle of meeting, until Solomon had built the house of the LORD in Jerusalem, and they served in their office according to their order.

{33} And these are the ones who ministered with their sons: Of the sons of the Kohathites were Heman the singer, the son of Joel, the son of Samuel, {34} the son of Elkanah, the son of Jeroham, the son of Eliel, the son of Toah, {35} the son of Zuph, the son of Elkanah, the son of Mahath, the son of Amasai, {36} the son of Elkanah, the son of Joel, the son of Azariah, the son of Zephaniah, {37} the son of Tahath, the son of Assir, the son of Ebiasaph, the son of Korah, {38} the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, the son of Israel.

{39} And his brother Asaph, who stood at his right hand, was Asaph the son of Berachiah, the son of Shimea, {40} the son of Michael, the son of Baaseiah, the son of Malchijah, {41} the son of Ethni, the son of Zerah, the son of Adaijah, {42} the son of Ethan, the son of Zimmah, the son of Shimei, {43} the son of Jahath, the son of Gershon, the son of Levi.

{44} Their brethren, the sons of Merari, on the left hand, were Ethan the son of Kishi, the son of Abdi, the son of Malluch, {45} the son of Hashabiah, the son of Amaziah, the son of Hilkiyah, {46} the son of Amzi, the son of Bani, the son of Shamer, {47} the son of Mahli, the son of Mushi, the son of Merari, the son of Levi.

Although the changes in the requirements of worship required differing responsibilities from those laid down by Moses, David remained loyal to the principles of the original instruction. It would have so easy for him to have been kept in bondage by the letter of the former, or fall into to error by abandoning the principles.

Only names of relevance are included. Some of names in the list are note worthy. In verse 28 we see Samuel the Prophet, the last judge of Israel. He was a descendent of Korah.

David appointed three worship leaders, one from each division; Heman, a Kohathite; Asaph, a Gershomite; and Ethan, a Merarite. They are all authors of some of the psalms. Heman was also a descendent of Korah. "*The sons of Korah*" were also writers of psalms.

## 9. REBELLION

The children of Israel were famous for their complaining throughout their Exodus journeying. Their complaining was rooted in the deliberate hardening of their hearts and their choice to not believe. This continuing attitude angered God and resulted in their failure to enter the Promised Land.

Num 14:22-23. "because all these men who have seen My glory and the signs which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have put Me to the test now these ten times, and have not heeded My voice, {23} they certainly shall not see the land of which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who rejected Me see it.

There were also occasions when their attitude hardened further and became open rebellion against the Lord and His designated leadership.

### 9.1. MIRIAM & AARON

The first major occasion came from a surprising source, and was rooted in jealousy.

Num 12:1-3. Then Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married; for he had married an Ethiopian woman. {2} So they said, "Has the LORD indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us also?" And the LORD heard it. {3} (Now the man Moses was very humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth.)

Miriam and Aaron complained against Moses using his Ethiopian wife as the justifiable reason<sup>20</sup>. Verse two suggests that the real reason was that they wanted more prominence in the leadership of the people. It appears that Miriam is the real force behind this coup, and that Aaron is again allowing himself to be easily led. I suggest this because she is mentioned first and the word *spoke* is a feminine verb in the Hebrew text. She also receives severe judgement from God.

Moses has proven himself to be a strong, forthright leader who did some difficult and unpopular things. Rather than this ability being rooted in pride, Moses was extremely humble.

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<sup>20</sup> After Moses had fled Egypt he had settled in the land of Midian and had married Zipporah the daughter of Jethro. It is unlikely that a Midianite would be confused with a Cushite (inhabitant of Ethiopia). Zipporah apparently returned with her father after their brief visit in Exodus 18. Moses therefore must have married a second woman, although we are not told anything about the event. We are not told whether this marriage took place years before when Moses was serving as a prince in Egypt, or whether the marriage took place during Israel journeying. I would favour the first option, but even at this time no law against Moses marrying a second wife or a foreigner.

Num 12:4-9. Suddenly the LORD said to Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, "Come out, you three, to the tabernacle of meeting!" So the three came out. {5} Then the LORD came down in the pillar of cloud and stood in the door of the tabernacle, and called Aaron and Miriam. And they both went forward. {6} Then He said, "Hear now My words: If there is a prophet among you, I, the LORD, make Myself known to him in a vision; I speak to him in a dream. {7} Not so with My servant Moses; He is faithful in all My house. {8} I speak with him face to face, even plainly, and not in dark sayings; and he sees the form of the LORD. Why then were you not afraid to speak against My servant Moses?" {9} So the anger of the LORD was aroused against them, and He departed.

Miriam and Aaron had claimed that the Lord has "spoken through us also". God now reveals the difference between prophets like themselves and Moses. It is obvious that God is angered by their attitude. Their familiarity with their younger brother had blinded them to the fact that they should have respected Moses and feared to speak against him.

Num 12:10-15. And when the cloud departed from above the tabernacle, suddenly Miriam became leprous, as white as snow. Then Aaron turned toward Miriam, and there she was, a leper. {11} So Aaron said to Moses, "Oh, my lord! Please do not lay this sin on us, in which we have done foolishly and in which we have sinned. {12} "Please do not let her be as one dead, whose flesh is half consumed when he comes out of his mother's womb!" {13} So Moses cried out to the LORD, saying, "Please heal her, O God, I pray!" {14} Then the LORD said to Moses, "If her father had but spit in her face, would she not be shamed seven days? Let her be shut out of the camp seven days and afterward she may be received again." {15} So Miriam was shut out of the camp seven days and the people did not journey till Miriam was brought in again.

The extent of God's anger is seen in the severity of the punishment. Miriam is totally leprous. Bishop Hall says that her foul tongue was rewarded with a foul face<sup>21</sup>. Aaron acts quickly and humbles himself before Moses, calling him *lord*, and asks for healing from Moses himself. Moses prays and God heals. But the Lord commands that she be put in isolation for seven days, as he sees her as being unclean. When a leper was being examined by the High Priest, he was kept in isolation for seven day periods between examinations.<sup>22</sup>

Let us be careful with how we use our tongue, in case God spits in our face.

## 9.2. KORAH

Having seen what God did to Miriam, it is amazing that there were further acts of rebellion against Moses' leadership. The next one results again from jealousy concerning Moses' position. Senior leaders within the camp are frustrated that they do not have a say in various decisions. There must have been a lot of discussion within the camp prior to this event. These men were probably voicing what many were feeling.

The next events take place after the failure to enter the Promised Land and the sentence to forty years in the wilderness.

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<sup>21</sup> Matthew Henry's Commentary

<sup>22</sup> Lev 13

Num 16:1-3. Now Korah the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, with Dathan and Abiram the sons of Eliab, and On the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took men; {2} and they rose up before Moses with some of the children of Israel, two hundred and fifty leaders of the congregation, representatives of the congregation, men of renown. {3} They gathered together against Moses and Aaron, and said to them, "You take too much upon yourselves, for all the congregation is holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the LORD?"

Moses had been a reluctant leader, but here he is accused of exalting himself. Korah is Moses' cousin, one of the Kohathites. Among their duties was the ark, the table, the lampstand, the altars and the utensils of the sanctuary. It appears he wanted the priesthood as well. We are warned to guard against selfish ambition<sup>23</sup>. Dathan, Abiram and On were Reubanites, who appear to feel excluded. After this verse On is not mentioned again. Perhaps he changed his mind and escaped the showdown which followed.

Num 16:4-11. So when Moses heard it, he fell on his face; {5} and he spoke to Korah and all his company, saying, "Tomorrow morning the LORD will show who is His and who is holy, and will cause him to come near to Him. That one whom He chooses He will cause to come near to Him. {6} "Do this: Take censers, Korah and all your company; {7} put fire in them and put incense in them before the LORD tomorrow, and it shall be that the man whom the LORD chooses is the holy one. You take too much upon yourselves, you sons of Levi!"

{8} Then Moses said to Korah, "Hear now, you sons of Levi: {9} Is it a small thing to you that the God of Israel has separated you from the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to Himself, to do the work of the tabernacle of the LORD, and to stand before the congregation to serve them; {10} and that He has brought you near to Himself, you and all your brethren, the sons of Levi, with you? And are you seeking the priesthood also? {11} Therefore you and all your company are gathered together against the LORD. And what is Aaron that you complain against him?"

Moses responds to the challenge to the priesthood by saying that those who think they are accepted by God and holy, then they should burn incense before the Lord, and let Him choose. People seem to have forgotten what happened to Nadab, and Abihu.

Num 16:12-15. And Moses sent to call Dathan and Abiram the sons of Eliab, but they said, "We will not come up! {13} Is it a small thing that you have brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey, to kill us in the wilderness, that you should keep acting like a prince over us? {14} Moreover you have not brought us into a land flowing with milk and honey, nor given us inheritance of fields and vineyards. Will you put out the eyes of these men? We will not come up!" {15} Then Moses was very angry, and said to the LORD, "Do not respect their offering. I have not taken one donkey from them, nor have I hurt one of them."

Fearful of Moses, but not the Lord, Dathan and Abiram refuse to come to the Tabernacle. They accuse Moses of acting like a prince. They say that Egypt was a land flowing with milk and honey,

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<sup>23</sup> Phil 2:3. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.

which was the phrase that Moses had used to describe the Promised Land. They are blaming him for their failure to enter the land God showed them.

Moses' prayer reveals that he had not charged the people any tribute.

Num 16:16-22. And Moses said to Korah, "Tomorrow, you and all your company be present before the LORD; you and they, as well as Aaron. {17} Let each take his censer and put incense in it, and each of you bring his censer before the LORD, two hundred and fifty censers; both you and Aaron, each with his censer." {18} So every man took his censer, put fire in it, laid incense on it, and stood at the door of the tabernacle of meeting with Moses and Aaron. {19} And Korah gathered all the congregation against them at the door of the tabernacle of meeting. Then the glory of the LORD appeared to all the congregation. {20} And the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, {21} "Separate yourselves from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment." {22} Then they fell on their faces, and said, "O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh, shall one man sin, and You be angry with all the congregation?"

The next day two hundred and fifty contenders came with their censers. The Lord's displeasure is against the whole of the congregation because they share in this disgruntle rebellious spirit of Korah. It is only the intercession of Moses and Aaron that save them.

Num 16:23-35. So the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, {24} "Speak to the congregation, saying, 'Get away from the tents of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram.'" {25} Then Moses rose and went to Dathan and Abiram, and the elders of Israel followed him. {26} And he spoke to the congregation, saying, "Depart now from the tents of these wicked men! Touch nothing of theirs, lest you be consumed in all their sins."

{27} So they got away from around the tents of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram; and Dathan and Abiram came out and stood at the door of their tents, with their wives, their sons, and their little children.

{28} And Moses said: "By this you shall know that the LORD has sent me to do all these works, for I have not done them of my own will. {29} "If these men die naturally like all men, or if they are visited by the common fate of all men, then the LORD has not sent me. {30} But if the LORD creates a new thing, and the earth opens its mouth and swallows them up with all that belongs to them, and they go down alive into the pit, then you will understand that these men have rejected the LORD."

{31} Now it came to pass, as he finished speaking all these words, that the ground split apart under them, {32} and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, with their households and all the men with Korah, with all their goods. {33} So they and all those with them went down alive into the pit; the earth closed over them, and they perished from among the assembly. {34} Then all Israel who were around them fled at their cry, for they said, "Lest the earth swallow us up also!" {35} And a fire came out from the LORD and consumed the two hundred and fifty men who were offering incense.

The action starts at the tents of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. God causes the ground to open under their tents and consume the guilty men and their households. Any member of their households who had feared the Lord could have escaped when Moses warned people to depart from around the

tents. Ebiasaph (1 Chron 6:37) did apparently leave his father's house and was the ancestor of the "sons of Korah" who wrote many of the psalms.

Num 26:9-11. The sons of Eliab were Nemuel, Dathan, and Abiram. These are the Dathan and Abiram, representatives of the congregation, who contended against Moses and Aaron in the company of Korah, when they contended against the LORD; {10} and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up together with Korah when that company died, when the fire devoured two hundred and fifty men; and they became a sign. {11} Nevertheless the children of Korah did not die.

Those who presumed to be holy and acceptable to the Lord perished when fire went out and consumed them at the Tabernacle.

Num 16:36-40. Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: {37} "Tell Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, to pick up the censers out of the blaze, for they are holy, and scatter the fire some distance away. {38} The censers of these men who sinned against their own souls, let them be made into hammered plates as a covering for the altar. Because they presented them before the LORD, therefore they are holy; and they shall be a sign to the children of Israel." {39} So Eleazar the priest took the bronze censers, which those who were burned up had presented, and they were hammered out as a covering on the altar, {40} to be a memorial to the children of Israel that no outsider, who is not a descendant of Aaron, should come near to offer incense before the LORD, that he might not become like Korah and his companions, just as the LORD had said to him through Moses.

Despite having been offered by rebellious usurpers the bronze censers, which survived the fire, are deemed holy, and are now the possession of the Lord. Therefore the Lord demands that they were made into a cover for the altar of burnt offering. The message in this is that rebellion results with an obstacle which bars our worship.

Despite these events and the memorial that the cover offered, the sin of presuming to burn incense was repeated by king Uzziah<sup>24</sup>.

Num 16:41-50. On the next day all the congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron, saying, "You have killed the people of the LORD." {42} Now it happened, when the congregation had gathered against Moses and Aaron, that they turned toward the tabernacle of meeting; and suddenly the cloud covered it, and the glory of the LORD appeared. {43} Then Moses and Aaron came before the tabernacle of meeting. {44} And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, {45} "Get away from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment." And they fell on their faces.

{46} So Moses said to Aaron, "Take a censer and put fire in it from the altar, put incense on it, and take it quickly to the congregation and make atonement for them; for wrath has gone out from the LORD. The plague has begun." {47} Then Aaron took it as Moses commanded, and ran into the midst of the assembly; and already the plague had begun among the people. So he put in the incense and made atonement for the people. {48} And he stood between the dead and the living; so the plague was stopped.

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<sup>24</sup> 2 Chr 26:16-21.

{49} Now those who died in the plague were fourteen thousand seven hundred, besides those who died in the Korah incident. {50} So Aaron returned to Moses at the door of the tabernacle of meeting, for the plague had stopped.

Once again the lives of the congregation are spared through the priestly functions of Moses and Aaron, the very persons they were complaining against. Despite having seen the ground open up and swallow Korah, Dathan and Abiram and fire come from the presence of the Lord and devour the two hundred and fifty would-be priests, the people blame Moses and Aaron. Their rebellious attitude causes the immediate appearance of the Lord's glory.

A description of the plague is not given, but it appears to have physically spread out. Aaron's incense *made atonement* and stayed the plague, and his physical presence separated the living from the dead. The burning incense is a type of intercessory prayer – standing in the gap and mediating for others. We also are reminded of how our Great High Priest is the demarcation line between those who are alive in God and those who are dead.

### 9.3. AARON'S ROD

The next chapter in Numbers is God's response to all the criticism towards His choice of leaders. In order to silence the grumbling of the Israelites He ordered a clear demonstration of His will. No will be able again to accuse Moses and Aaron of nepotism.

Num 17:1-5. And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: {2} "Speak to the children of Israel, and get from them a rod from each father's house, all their leaders according to their fathers' houses; twelve rods. Write each man's name on his rod. {3} "And you shall write Aaron's name on the rod of Levi. For there shall be one rod for the head of each father's house. {4} "Then you shall place them in the tabernacle of meeting before the Testimony, where I meet with you. {5} "And it shall be that the rod of the man whom I choose will blossom; thus I will rid Myself of the complaints of the children of Israel, which they make against you."

A leader of each of the twelve tribes was to supply a rod – the symbol of authority and power. Each rod was to be identified by the leader's name inscribed upon it. These dry sticks are then to be stuck into the ground. Naturally a day later all the rods would still be as they were left. But God states that one of these rods will blossom, as a sign of God's choice of that tribe.

Num 17:6-11. So Moses spoke to the children of Israel, and each of their leaders gave him a rod apiece, for each leader according to their fathers' houses, twelve rods; and the rod of Aaron was among their rods. {7} And Moses placed the rods before the LORD in the tabernacle of witness. {8} Now it came to pass on the next day that Moses went into the tabernacle of witness, and behold, the rod of Aaron, of the house of Levi, had sprouted and put forth buds, had produced blossoms and yielded ripe almonds.

{9} Then Moses brought out all the rods from before the LORD to all the children of Israel; and they looked, and each man took his rod. {10} And the LORD said to Moses, "Bring Aaron's rod back before the Testimony, to be kept as a sign against the rebels, that you may put their complaints away from Me, lest they die." {11} Thus did Moses; just as the LORD had commanded him, so he did.

The next day it was Aaron's rod that had been chosen. Whilst in God's presence in the Tabernacle, not only had it budded but it had flowered and produced almonds. The dead stick had been

resurrected back to life. Jesus was confirmed as our Great High Priest through the resurrection from the dead. We too experience a quickening and are made fruitful by spending time in God's presence.

The lampstand within the Tabernacle, which was tended by the priests, was decorated with almonds<sup>25</sup>. The production of almonds on Aaron's rod was therefore fitting.

As a memorial Aaron's rod was now to be kept within the Ark. To remind all would be rebels that the priesthood and service of the Tabernacle belonged to the Levites.

### 10. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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<sup>25</sup> Exo 25:31-33. "You shall also make a lampstand of pure gold; the lampstand shall be of hammered work. Its shaft, its branches, its bowls, its ornamental knobs, and flowers shall be of one piece. {32} "And six branches shall come out of its sides: three branches of the lampstand out of one side, and three branches of the lampstand out of the other side. {33} "Three bowls shall be made like almond blossoms on one branch, with an ornamental knob and a flower, and three bowls made like almond blossoms on the other branch, with an ornamental knob and a flower; and so for the six branches that come out of the lampstand.

