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Exodus: Delivered By God, For God / High Priest's Breastpiece; Eternal Security; God's Love / Exodus 28:15–30

The breastpiece of the high priest, an integral part of the priestly clothing, stood to Israel as a reminder of the faithfulness of God to His people. Today it is a typological item that points us toward Christ, His work and the eternal security of all the elect, the chosen people of God

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## Introduction

By this point it should have become very apparent to each of us that the entirety of the instructions being given to Moses are very interwoven and interconnected. Each piece of the tabernacle that we have studied and each of the items of clothing that are described for us in Scripture come together demonstrating the precise nature by which God revealed Himself to the Israelites and by which He reveals Himself and His redemptive plan to us, pointing us ever towards Christ.

Briefly, you may recall that God's specific instructions to Moses regarding the clothing of the priests and, more specifically, the High Priest, was that they were to be made "for glory and for beauty". It is necessary that we continually keep this truth before ourselves as we look at each specific article and item that is included in the instructions. The reason that we need continually remind ourselves of this is that we are, as creatures of flesh, easily distracted and bored. We often find that when we read passages that we do not understand or seem to be repetitive that we tend to start skimming to get through the material to check off our to do list versus reading for the purposes of understanding the text before us. We think that we have seen all that there is to see and quickly move on to something that is to us more exciting.

Often times this results in us making excuses to ourselves, and maybe others, but mostly to ourselves, and in some cases we even go biblical with our excuses using scriptural references that speak of the secret things of God. The problem, however, is not that the things have been kept secret,

although there certainly are some things that have been, but rather we simply do not wish to put forth the effort to seek understanding and so we skip to the things that we think are easier to understand. For example, many would much rather read of Daniel in the Lion's den, or David and Goliath, than they would to go through the tabernacle and the priestly clothing or the genealogies, because they think that they understand the meaning of the texts in those places...but they begin with the wrong frame of reference...or standard by which to determine the meaning of the text. The standard is, of course, God's Word; it is built, piece by piece, word by word, defining for us who God is, demonstrating for us how He works and continually reminding us that He Alone is GOD... and that He is Holy and that all things exist for His glory...

But to understand these truths, to grasp firmly the realities and truth of God, one has to be willing to work through the Word, the entire Word. Paul writes in 2 Timothy 2:15 "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth." Therefore, since we are called to be workmen, let us labor faithfully in His word to know the "glory and the beauty" in the High Priestly clothing as we continue this morning by looking at the breastpiece. Our text for today, and next week, will come from Exodus 28:15-30. In these verses we will read of the breastpiece and the Urim and Thummin, today we will focus in on the breastpiece itself and next week we will tackle the Urim and Thummin. If you will,

## Exodus 28:15-30

Please stand for the reading of the inerrant, infallible, complete, authoritative and sufficient Word of God

### **Exodus 28:15-30 LSB**

"You shall make a breastpiece of judgment, the work of a skillful designer; like the work of the ephod you shall make it: of gold, of blue and purple and scarlet *material* and fine twisted linen you shall make it.

"It shall be square, *having been* folded double, a span in length and a span in width.

"You shall mount on it four rows of stones; the first row *shall be* a row of

ruby, topaz, and emerald;

and the second row a turquoise, a sapphire, and a diamond;

and the third row a jacinth, an agate, and an amethyst;

and the fourth row a beryl and an onyx and a jasper; they shall be set in gold settings.

"The stones shall be according to the names of the sons of Israel: twelve, according to their names; they shall be *like* the engravings of a signet, each according to his name for the twelve tribes.

"You shall make on the breastpiece chains of a twisted work of cords in pure gold.

"You shall make on the breastpiece two rings of gold, and you shall put the two rings on the two ends of the breastpiece.

"You shall put the two cords of gold on the two rings at the ends of the breastpiece.

"You shall put the two ends of the two cords on the two filigree *settings*, and you shall put them on the shoulder pieces of the ephod at the front of it.

"You shall make two rings of gold and shall place them on the two ends of the breastpiece, on the edge of it, which is toward the inner side of the ephod.

"You shall make two rings of gold and put them on the bottom of the two shoulder pieces of the ephod, on the front of it close to the place where it is joined, above the skillfully woven band of the ephod.

"They shall bind the breastpiece by its rings to the rings of the ephod with a blue cord, so that it will be on the skillfully woven band of the ephod, and that the breastpiece will not come loose from the ephod.

"Aaron shall carry the names of the sons of Israel in the breastpiece of judgment over his heart when he comes into the holy place, for a remembrance before Yahweh continually.

"You shall put in the breastpiece of judgment the Urim and the Thummim, and they shall be over Aaron's heart when he comes in before Yahweh; and Aaron shall carry the judgment of the sons of Israel over his heart before Yahweh continually.

Father, our heart is drawn out in thankfulness to You. We are thankful for your grace, that You came to us in Christ. We are thankful for the influence and assistance of the Holy Spirit and for the intercession of Christ. We are reminded of your grace and mercy in the sweetness of our Christian service, as we contemplate eternity in your presence, your continued provision in our life and for the simple fact that You and You alone have raised us from death to new life. Father we do not seek the favor of men for it is fleeting where Yours is eternal. Lord we desire to serve you, in whatever way that you require of us, regardless of the trials, tribulations or persecutions that we may face. May we never cease to find Your grace sufficient for our lives and may we never confine ourselves to seek you on occasion but to acknowledge you in all things, to glorify you in all things, to make Your way ours. To this end, Lord, establish us in Christ, settle us, give us assurance and certainty that we are His and He is ours that our hearts will be filled with joy and peace. Father we ask all of this in the blessed name of Jesus, Amen.

## The Centerpiece

You may recall from our text last week, specifically verse 4 of chapter 28 that the breastpiece is the very first item that God mentions in regards to the clothing that He is commanding to be made for the High Priest. Exodus 28:4

### **Exodus 28:4 LSB**

"These are the garments which they shall make: a breastpiece and an ephod and a robe and a tunic of checkered work, a turban and a sash, and they shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother and his sons, in order for him to minister as priest to Me.

This denotes that this is the central element or the most significant article of clothing. Each of the remaining items serve as back drop and foundational material for the breastpiece. Note that the colors and the material here again are of the blue, purple, crimson and white, the same arrangement that we have seen throughout the fabrication of the tabernacle and even the ephod that the breastpiece is attached to, signifying for us the unification of the priesthood and the tabernacle and all pointing towards Christ. As a reminder the celestial blue, the color of the heavens reminding of His heavenly origins; the royal purple, reminding us of His sovereign kingship over all; the bloody crimson, reminding us of His precious blood spilt on the cross for the sins of His people; and finally the white, reminding us of His purity and perfection, as both truly God and truly man, enabling Him to grant us the righteousness that ensures our entry into the presence of the Almighty, behind the veil, in the Holy of Holies, as the people of God, redeemed for His glory and our good.

The breastpiece, which is also referred to as a breastplate by some, although it is not a piece of armor and was made of cloth not metal, was attached to the ephod. Last week as we studied the ephod itself, I briefly mentioned that in most places in scripture, the two are not mentioned separately, but as part of a singular unit. The text describes the piece as being roughly nine inches square, the measurement that is used here is a span, this is the distance from the tip of the thumb to the tip of the pinky finger when the hand and fingers are spread apart, and it is also roughly one-half of a cubit, The material is doubled over and actually forms a pouch, into which the Urim and Thummin are inserted.

The pouch is then attached to the ephod by golden rings, two at the top corners, which are then attached by braided, twisted gold chain to the gold filigree of the shoulder pieces of the ephod, and two rings at the bottom corners that are attached to the ephod by the blue cord. When the breastpiece is in place and properly attached verse 28 says that Exodus 28:28 "the breastpiece will not come loose from the ephod." meaning that the breastpiece and the ephod with its onyx stones form a singular unit.

## The Typology of the Breast-piece

As we alluded to in the introduction and as scripture elsewhere demonstrates, every jot and tittle of God's Word carries weight and

meaning and the breastpiece is certainly not merely a simple piece of clothing to be worn. In fact, within the fabrication and instructions regarding this piece are magnificent realities to behold. AW Pink is once again helpful to us in summary as he writes:

### **Gleanings in Exodus 2. Its Significance**

There are at least five things which serve as guides to help us ascertain the distinctive typical meaning of this part of the high priest's dress. First, its name: it is called the "breastplate of judgment" (v. 15). Second, the twelve gems 'set in it, on which were engraved the names of Israel's twelve tribes (vv. 17–21). Third, its inseparability from the ephod: "that the breastplate be not loosed from the ephod" (v. 28). Fourth, the place where the breastplate was worn: it was upon the high priest's "heart" (v. 20). Fifth, the mysterious "Urim and Thummin" which were placed in it (v. 30).

The first and fifth of the five things that Pink has listed are very much interdependent upon each other, in fact it is the Urim and Thummin which give weight to calling this the breastpiece of judgement. So that we are faithful to God's word we will simply mention them briefly today and in detail next week.

This leaves us with the remaining three details, the gemstones, the inseparability of the ephod, which we have mentioned and will further explore and the location of the breastpiece as it was worn.

As one reads the text, it should become quite clear that as beautifully crafted, and rich in meaning, as the fabric was, it merely served as a backdrop for the twelve stones that would adorn the breastpiece, and on each of these twelve stones was engraved the name of one of the tribes of Israel. Try, if you will, to picture the High Priest of Israel standing before you, He is dressed primarily in white linen, with a vest like garment, the ephod, going from his shoulders to his thighs, in center of which, attached by gold, is this breastpiece with its twelve precious stones, held securely in place over the heart of the high priest. As he went about his priestly duties, he carried these twelve stones, bearing them on his heart, if you will, before God. For our study of the onyx stones that were likewise engraved with the names of the sons of Israel, we talked about how they were positioned on the shoulders, the place of strength and support, here, the stones are placed in a position of affection.

As it was with the sons of Israel, so it is with all of God's people, Christ, our

Great High Priest,

### **Gleanings in Exodus 2. Its Significance**

bearing on His heart, sustaining, and presenting before God, His blood-bought people.

## The Eternal Security of the Saints

As one studies the text surrounding the clothing of the High Priest we are continually pointed to the fact that this is all being done “before God” or in the “presence of God”. We need to understand this statement. In our common language, within the church that is, it is standard for us to speak of God’s presence, but in a way that almost makes it ordinary. I want to take great care here that I articulate this in such a way as to carefully explain and demonstrate this for us because it is such an important part of our Christian life. Our lives are filled with things that we take for granted. We do it with things of all shapes and sizes, from the family surrounding us to the simplest pleasures of life, such as clean water, abundant food, comfortable and stylish clothing. There is one thing, however, above all other things that we take for granted and that is the gift of the continual presence of the Holy Spirit that indwells the believer.

This was not the case for the Israelites. Although they did have the “presence of God” in the pillar of cloud and fire that went before them, it was unapproachable. They could not simply bow their head, enter into the presence of the almighty and make their petitions known. This could only be done through an intermediary, the priests and especially the High Priest. This is why it was such a big deal that the names of the sons of Israel were engraved, first in groups on the shoulders and then individually on the heart. Douglas Stuart writes:

### **Exodus The Breastpiece (28:15–30)**

Already the reader is aware that the two onyx shoulder stones of the ephod held the engraved names of the twelve tribes, six to a shoulder stone (vv. 9–12). Now the reader learns that there would be yet another means of representing those twelve tribes—this time by twelve individual precious stones, one for each tribe, with the name of a single tribe engraved on a single stone. By means of the combination of the shoulder stones and the breastpiece stones, the Israelite tribes were represented both as groups and individually by the high priest. In that way both the entire family and the

individual families were “listed” before God at all times of worship.

He goes on to explain that by following the pattern to its logical conclusion, it speaks to each of individual person of the Israelites being represented before God. Not only were they represented, but if one studies the text well, they will see that they were securely held. Note first the attention to the detail of fastening the breastpiece to the ephod, the assurance that it remains connected as we have already seen in verse 28, but then, if you notice verse 20, there is a small clause at the very end of that verse which reads “They shall be set in gold settings”. The word that we translate as setting can also be translated as inclosing, meaning that the not only was the breastpiece securely held to the ephod but the stones are securely held to the breastpiece. While this demonstrates the continual presence of the individual Israelite before God, it serves us as a type...in this case pointing to the eternal security of each individual believer, upheld in the presence of the Father on the shoulders and in the heart of the Son. AW Pink once again is helpful:

#### **Gleanings in Exodus 2. Its Significance**

Their position or standing before God was neither affected nor altered by their changing circumstances, infirmities or sins. Whenever Aaron went into the holy place, there on his heart were the names of all God’s people. Emphasizing this truth of security, note carefully how that their names were not simply written upon (so that their erasure was possible) the precious stones, but “engraved” (v. 21)!

Still emphasizing the same thought, notice also how that each jewel was secured to the breastplate by a golden setting: “they shall be set in gold in their inclosings” (v. 20). Thus it was impossible for them to slip out of their places, or for any one of them to be lost! Mark, too, the provision made for firmly fixing in place the breastplate itself. This is brought before us in vv. 21–28. It was fastened by “chains at the ends of wreathen work of pure gold” (v. 22), and these were passed through “two rings of gold on the ends of the breastplate.” Thus the people of God (as represented by their names) were chained to the high priest!

What a precious, magnificent and wonderful gift we have been given!! To know that we are bound eternally before the Father, not by anything that we have done or will do, but because of Christ!! The more we see this the less “ordinary” it will become and the more wonder, awe, amazement we will have as we recognize what it truly means to be in the presence of



God!!!

## The Stones

As we continue to study the details of the breastpiece we cannot help but to be captivated by the listing of stones that are used. It should be of interest to note that the stones are not just an arbitrary listing. Even though we cannot, with 100% accuracy define each of the stones or its colors, what we can do is note the similarities between this list and others found in scripture. We read in Ezekiel 28:13

### **Ezekiel 28:13 LSB**

"You were in Eden, the garden of God;

Every precious stone was your covering:

The ruby, the topaz, and the diamond;

The beryl, the onyx, and the jasper;

The lapis lazuli, the turquoise, and the emerald;

And the gold, the workmanship of your settings and sockets,

Was in you.

On the day that you were created

They were prepared.

and in Revelation 21:19-20

### **Revelation 21:19–20 LSB**

The foundation stones of the city wall were adorned with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation stone was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, chalcedony; the fourth, emerald;

the fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, topaz; the tenth, chrysoprase; the eleventh, jacinth; the twelfth, amethyst.

Philip Ryken is helpful as he writes:

### **Exodus—Saved for God's Glory The Breastpiece**

Nearly all these gemstones were found in the Garden of Eden (see Ezek. 28:13). We will see them again in Heaven, where they decorate the foundations of God's city (Rev. 21:19, 20). This is a hint that what God was doing with Israel at the tabernacle was part of his plan for the world—a plan that stretches from creation to glory.

These gemstones represented the people of God. There were twelve stones—one for each of the twelve tribes of Israel. Each stone was engraved with the name of a tribe. This was a vivid reminder of what God said when his people first arrived at Mount Sinai: "Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exod. 19:5, 6a; cf. 1 Pet. 2:9). God's promise was displayed on the breastpiece. As the high priest went about his sacred duties, he represented the holy nation of God's people—a kingdom of priests. By their inscriptions, the ruby, topaz, and emerald signified that these people were God's treasure. The gemstones declared that Israel was precious unto God.

I am not sure how many of you have ever seen raw, uncut gemstones of any type, but let me assure you, that they are not found in nature in the dazzlingly brilliant way in which we display them. They are, if you will, rough. In fact a diamond, or any other gemstone, found in its natural state is said to be "in the rough". There is nothing in the natural state of the gem that makes it worthy...much as there is nothing in the natural state of humanity that makes it worthy. Both, apart from the choosing of God, are nothing spectacular or noteworthy. The fact is the worthiness and excellency, or shall we even say righteousness, that is imputed to both the gemstone, through the process of cutting and polishing, and the believer, through grace by faith in the finished work of Christ, that makes them worthy.

CH Bright notes:

### **Gleanings in Exodus 3. Its Jewels**

Concerning each stone it has been well said, "Much, very much, of its beauty depends upon its cutting. Cut skillfully, so as to refract the rays of light from many sides, it sparkles with a beauty quite unknown to its natural condition. Thus, too, with believers; undoubtedly each one has some

inherent characteristic difference, but only as the Divine hand in much patience and skill cuts and polishes the stone to catch and discover the colors of the Divine light which illuminates it doth it appear beautiful. Its beauty is not its own, but it has been endowed with capacity to appreciate and reflect the beauty of Him who is light and love; and it is to reflect the beauties of the perfect One that we have been chosen—'that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus' (Eph. 2:7). So when that day of manifestation of the glory of His grace comes, 'the nations shall walk in her light,' Revelation 21:24"

## Positioned

We have already noted the position of the breastpiece as it was worn and how it was secured, the stones that were set upon it, each engraved with the name of a tribe of Israel, all falling over the heart of the High Priest. We need to, just for a few moments, look at this a little deeper. Note over the course of two verses, 29 and 30, that the phrase "over his heart" appears three times. Again, this, as we have noted in the past, denotes a significance and it is one that requires more than a cursory examination. AW Pink is again helpful to us as he writes:

### **Gleanings in Exodus 6. Its Position**

Lovely type was this of our Redeemer in His present heavenly ministry, exercising His power to uphold His poor people; and His deep, tender, unchangeable love embracing them, binding them close to His heart, and presenting them to the Father in the glory and preciousness of the splendor with which He is invested.

"This is precious, and oftentimes we need to refresh ourselves by 'considering' thus 'the Apostle and High Priest of our confession' (Heb. 3:1). There are times when we forget that we have One on high whom, in grace, cares for and watches over those who are treading the path of faith He once trod on earth. And there are times when, though we remember this, we limit either His love or His power. Precious, then, is it to be thus reminded that according to what He can do, His love makes us willing to do; and according to what His affection is, He hath strength to carry out what it dictates" (C. H. Bright).

It is beautiful to note in the Song of Solomon how the Bride says to her Beloved, "Set me as a seal upon Thine heart, as a seal upon Thine

arm" (8:6): let my name be graven deep in Thine heart, where love is strong as death, which many waters cannot quench, which the floods of the Almighty have not drowned. And let my name be also graven in the seat of Thy power, that I may be upheld from sin and folly, that I may not be like the adulterer and adulteress who seek the friendship of the world. If such a prayer suited the desires of an earthy people, how much more may this petition express the devotion and the longings of Christ's heavenly people!

Finally, the blue cord, the binding which secures the bottom of the breastpiece to the ephod, completing the type before us of how we are bound to Him, not by any action of ourself, but by His strength and might. Philip Ryken writes and then quotes Edward Dennett:

#### **Exodus—Saved for God's Glory** *Close to the Heart*

He has bound us to himself with the cords of his everlasting love, making us secure forever in a place close to his heart.

Anyone who wants to be loved with this kind of love should pray to receive Jesus as Savior and Lord, making the request that King Solomon made: "Place me like a seal over your heart" (Song 8:6a). Here is how one Bible teacher explained what the breastpiece in Exodus teaches us about salvation in Christ:

The names of God's people [are] borne upon the heart of the priest, shining out in all the sparkling lustre and beauty of the stones on which they are engraven. This symbolises the fact that believers are before God in all the acceptance of Christ. When God looks upon the great High Priest, He beholds His people upon His heart, as well as upon His shoulders, adorned with all the beauty of the One on whom His eye ever rests with perfect delight.... And with what joy does He so present them before God! For they are those for whom He has died, and whom He has cleansed with His own most precious blood, those whom He has made the objects of His own love, and whom finally He will bring to be forever with Him; and He pleads for them before God according to all the strength of these ties.

## Conclusion

As we prepare to close our study today, we are once again confronted with the depth, beauty, and significance of the High Priest's breastpiece. Every element—its materials, its colors, its stones, its engravings, its fastening—has been divinely designed to reveal to us something of the nature of our

God and His redemptive work in Christ. These instructions, given with such precision to Moses, were not arbitrary details to be skimmed over, but rather, they point us to the glory of God's plan, meticulously woven throughout history and culminating in the person and work of Jesus Christ, our Great High Priest.

It is no small thing that the breastpiece was fastened so securely to the ephod. This speaks directly to the security of God's people in Christ. Just as the names of the tribes of Israel were bound over the heart of the High Priest, so too are we bound to Christ, engraved upon His heart, eternally secured in His love. How often do we forget this glorious reality? How often do we struggle with doubts and fears, questioning whether we are truly held by Him? Yet the image before us leaves no room for uncertainty. We are fastened to Christ, not by our own strength or merit, but by the divine decree of God and the unbreakable cords of His love.

And so, I ask you this: Do you live as one who is securely held in Christ? Do you rest in the assurance that your name is not merely written, but engraved upon His heart? Or do you continue to strive in your own strength, as if your security in Him is something that ebbs and flows with your failures and successes? The imagery of the breastpiece demands a response from us. It calls us to trust, to rest, and to rejoice in the truth that we are His, and He is ours.

Furthermore, consider the gemstones—each one individually chosen, cut, polished, and set in gold. They were not valuable in and of themselves, but were made precious by the craftsman's skill. Likewise, we, in our natural state, are but rough, uncut stones—marred by sin and unworthy of divine favor. Yet in Christ, we are shaped, refined, and made into treasures fit for the presence of God. The beauty of the breastpiece is not in the fabric or the gold alone, but in the transformed stones that bear the names of God's people. Have you submitted yourself to the refining hand of the Master Craftsman? Are you allowing His Word to shape and sanctify you, so that you might more fully reflect His glory?

And then there is the position of the breastpiece—over the heart of the High Priest. This is not merely a decorative choice; it is a declaration of love. God's people are not carried indifferently or mechanically by their Mediator. They are borne upon His heart, in the place of deepest affection. This is the gospel: that Christ, in His love, has taken us upon Himself, interceding for

us, representing us before the Father, and securing our place in His eternal kingdom. If this truth has not yet gripped your heart, let it do so now. Let the reality of Christ's love break through any hardness or apathy, and draw you into a deeper communion with Him.

Finally, the blue cord—the binding that secures the breastpiece to the ephod—reminds us that we are not bound to Christ by our own strength or faithfulness, but by His. It is His righteousness, His obedience, His steadfast love that keeps us in Him. The world may shake, our hearts may falter, but we remain secure because Christ Himself holds us fast.

So then, what is our response? It is to worship. To adore our Great High Priest who carries us on His heart before the Father. It is to trust, knowing that we are eternally secure in Him. It is to submit, allowing Him to shape and refine us as He sees fit. It is to rejoice, knowing that we are counted among His treasured possession.

May we never grow indifferent to these glorious truths. May we never skim over the details of God's Word, but instead, may we dig deep, laboring as workmen to rightly handle the Word of Truth. And may our hearts be filled with joy and peace, knowing that we are held, loved, and eternally secure in Christ, our Great High Priest. Amen.