

The Book of Exodus, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 20: The Priesthood and Holy Garments

Exodus 28:1–29:46

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Doctrinally, Exodus 28 and 29 set before us the office of priesthood and the meaning of consecration. A holy God and a sinful people cannot simply meet; there must be a mediator, garments of glory, washing, anointing, and atoning blood before anyone draws near. The student must grasp two truths the chapters teach together. First, God graciously provided a way for Israel to approach Him, a priest who bore their very names into His presence on his shoulders and over his heart. Second, that whole system was provisional and incomplete: the priests were sinners who needed atonement themselves, they died and were replaced, and their sacrifices had to be repeated endlessly because they could never finally take away sin.

The lesson must then move forward to Christ, for the New Testament insists this is exactly where the Aaronic priesthood points. Hebrews 7–10 presents Jesus as a better High Priest, after the order of Melchizedek, who needs no sacrifice for His own sins, who holds His office permanently because He lives forever, who offered Himself once for all, and through whom we now draw near to God. Teach the typology with discipline: the names on the shoulders and heart foreshadow Christ who carries and intercedes for His people (Hebrews 7:25); the washing, anointing, and atoning blood are met fully in Him (Hebrews 9–10); the gold plate 'Holy to the LORD' anticipates the One who makes us and our worship acceptable. Be clear that we do not reinstate this priesthood or its sacrifices; they are fulfilled and set aside in Christ. He is our only High Priest, and every Christian is a priest only in the spiritual sense of offering spiritual sacrifices through Him (1 Peter 2:5, 9; Revelation 1:6).

The formation aim is that the student would draw near to God with confidence and rest his standing entirely on Christ. The man who feels disqualified, unclean, or unfit needs to see that fitness to approach God was always something God provided, never something the worshiper manufactured. And the believer who quietly trusts his own worthiness needs to be humbled by the discovery that even the priest, even the holy gifts, carried guilt that had to be borne by a mediator. Aim the student's heart at glad, reverent, confident access through Jesus, the great High Priest who carries his name on His heart and never lays it down (Hebrews 4:14–16).

Question 1

Student Question:

Read 28:1–5. God set apart Aaron and his sons 'to serve me as priests,' and called for holy garments 'for glory and for beauty.' What does the very existence of an appointed priesthood

teach us about the gulf between a holy God and a sinful people, and about how that gulf is to be bridged?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Chapter 28 opens by setting apart Aaron and his sons (Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar) 'to serve me as priests' (28:1). The very establishment of a priesthood answers a problem the previous chapters have made vivid: a holy God dwells among a sinful people, and someone must be appointed to mediate the approach. The people could not simply walk in; a priest must go in for them.

God then commands 'holy garments for Aaron... for glory and for beauty' (28:2). The dignity of the office was clothed in visible splendor, gold, blue, purple, scarlet, and fine linen (28:5). This was not vanity; it was God dressing the office in a glory that befit standing before Him, and that pointed beyond Aaron to a greater glory still.

Notice that the priesthood was God's appointment, not human ambition. Aaron did not volunteer or seize the office; he was called (compare Hebrews 5:4, 'no one takes this honor for himself, but only when called by God, just as Aaron was'). The same passage goes on to say Christ too did not exalt Himself but was appointed by God (Hebrews 5:5-6).

Teach the basic logic: the gulf between God's holiness and human sin is real, and God Himself bridges it by appointing a mediator. This prepares the student to see that the whole apparatus of priesthood is gracious provision, and that it finds its fulfillment in the one Mediator, Christ (1 Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 7-10).

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The priesthood exists because a holy God and a sinful people need a mediator.
- The garments were 'for glory and for beauty,' dignity befitting the office (28:2).
- Priesthood was God's appointment, not human ambition (Hebrews 5:4).
- God Himself provides the way for sinners to approach Him.
- The Aaronic priesthood points forward to Christ the one Mediator (1 Timothy 2:5).

Discussion Prompts

- Why does the existence of a priesthood imply a gulf between God and people?
- What does it mean that the office was God's appointment, not Aaron's choice?
- How do the glorious garments prepare us to look for a greater Priest?

Question 2

Student Question:

Read 28:2-3. The garments were made by those whom God had 'filled with a spirit of skill.' The priest did not invent his own clothing or appoint himself; everything came from God's design and

calling. Where are you tempted to take to yourself a standing before God that He alone can give, and what would it mean to receive your place from Him instead?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-question presses the truth that the priest's standing came entirely from God. The garments were made by craftsmen 'whom I have filled with a spirit of skill' (28:3); the office was conferred, not claimed. Everything about Aaron's place before God was given to him.

The temptation in every age is to construct our own standing before God, by religious performance, by comparison with others, by a sense of personal worthiness. We try to dress ourselves for God's presence in garments of our own making.

But the gospel teaches that our acceptance is received, not achieved. We are clothed not in our own righteousness but in Christ (Galatians 3:27; Philippians 3:9; Isaiah 61:10). Like Aaron, we do not appoint ourselves or weave our own worthiness; God clothes and calls us in His Son.

Press for honesty and concreteness. Where is the student trying to earn a place he can only receive? What would it look like this week to stop manufacturing his own standing and rest in the standing God gives in Christ? The relief of the gospel is precisely this: the garments are provided.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The priest's standing was conferred by God, not claimed by Aaron.
- We are tempted to construct our own acceptance before God.
- Acceptance is received, not achieved (Galatians 3:27; Philippians 3:9).
- We are clothed in Christ's righteousness, not our own.
- Resting in God-given standing brings relief, not anxious striving.

Discussion Prompts

- Where are you trying to earn a standing God wants to give you?
- How does being 'clothed in Christ' change how you come to God?
- What would it look like this week to receive your place rather than manufacture it?

Question 3

Student Question:

Read 28:9-12. The names of the twelve tribes were engraved on two onyx stones set on the high priest's shoulders, that he might 'bear their names before the LORD on his two shoulders for remembrance.' What does it reveal about God that He wanted His people carried, by name, into His presence?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verses 9–12 describe two onyx stones, each engraved with six of the tribal names, set on the shoulder pieces of the ephod 'as stones of remembrance for the sons of Israel.' Aaron was to 'bear their names before the LORD on his two shoulders for remembrance' (28:12).

This is a tender and significant image. When the high priest entered God's presence, he did not go in as a private individual; he carried the entire people with him, by name, engraved in stone where they could not slip off or be forgotten. The shoulders are the place of strength and burden-bearing: the priest bore the people up before God.

The detail that the names were 'for remembrance... before the LORD' does not mean God is forgetful, but that God appointed a visible, permanent testimony that His people were continually represented before Him. They were never out of His sight, because their names were borne in continually.

This naturally foreshadows Christ, who carries His people on His strength and bears them up before the Father (Isaiah 53:11–12; John 10:11, 27–29). The next question will draw out the heart side; here the emphasis falls on God's desire that His people be carried, by name, into His presence. He relates to a people He knows and will not lose.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The high priest bore the tribes' names on his shoulders into God's presence (28:12).
- The shoulders speak of strength and burden-bearing for the people.
- The names engraved in stone picture a people who cannot be forgotten or lost.
- God desires His people carried, by name, before Him continually.
- This foreshadows Christ who bears and keeps His people (John 10:27–29).

Discussion Prompts

- Why did God want the people's names carried into His presence?
- What does bearing them on the shoulders suggest about the priest's role?
- How does this reveal God's heart toward a people He knows by name?

Question 4

Student Question:

Read 28:29. Aaron also bore the names over his heart, in the breastpiece, 'to bring them to regular remembrance before the LORD.' Carried on the shoulders speaks of strength; carried over the heart speaks of love. How does it change the way you walk through this week to know that Christ carries you in both His strength and His love before the Father?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question moves from the shoulders to the heart. The breastpiece, set with twelve stones engraved with the tribal names, was worn over Aaron's chest, so that he bore 'the names of the

sons of Israel... on his heart... to bring them to regular remembrance before the LORD' (28:29). Carried on the shoulders speaks of strength; carried over the heart speaks of love.

Together the two images give a complete picture: the priest holds the people both by his strength and in his affection as he stands before God. They are borne up and they are cherished. This is gracious provision designed to assure Israel of their place before God.

For the believer, this finds its fullness in Christ. Our great High Priest carries us in His strength, holding us so that none can snatch us from His hand (John 10:28–29), and in His love, for 'having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end' (John 13:1). He intercedes for us continually (Hebrews 7:25; Romans 8:34).

The application is daily and practical. The student walks through the week not as one striving to get God's attention, but as one already carried, by name, on the strength and heart of his Priest. Press the student to name how this assurance would change a specific worry, fear, or sense of distance he is carrying right now.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The names over the heart picture the people cherished, not merely carried (28:29).
- Shoulders speak of strength; the heart speaks of love.
- Christ carries us in His strength so none can snatch us away (John 10:28–29).
- Christ carries us in His love and intercedes continually (Hebrews 7:25).
- Assurance of being carried reshapes how we face fear and distance.

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean to you that Christ carries you on His heart, not just His shoulders?
- How would living as one already carried change a specific worry this week?
- Where do you tend to feel distant from God that this truth could steady?

Question 5

Student Question:

Read 28:30 and 28:36–38. God gave the Urim and Thummim for seeking His will, and set on the turban a gold plate, 'Holy to the LORD,' so that Aaron might 'bear any guilt from the holy things' that the people's offerings 'may be accepted.' What do these two provisions, guidance and accepted worship, teach us about a God who makes a way for sinners to know Him and to be received by Him?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question joins two provisions in chapter 28. First, the Urim and Thummim, placed in the breastpiece (28:30), by which the high priest sought God's will for the people. The means is not

fully explained, but the point is clear: God provided a way for His people to seek and know His guidance.

Second, the gold plate engraved 'Holy to the LORD,' fastened on the turban (28:36). By it Aaron 'shall bear any guilt from the holy things that the people of Israel consecrate,' so that their gifts 'may be accepted before the LORD' (28:38). Even Israel's holy offerings carried defilement that needed a mediator, and God provided one so their worship would be received.

Both provisions display a God who makes a way for sinners both to know Him and to be accepted by Him. Guidance is given; acceptable worship is made possible. Neither is something the people could secure for themselves; both were God's gracious arrangement.

For us, guidance comes now through Christ and the completed Word of God (Hebrews 1:1-2; 2 Timothy 3:16-17); we do not seek a modern Urim and Thummim. And acceptance comes through Christ our High Priest, who bears the guilt clinging even to our worship and makes us and our offerings acceptable (1 Peter 2:5; Hebrews 13:15). Keep the typology grounded: the New Testament explicitly grounds our guidance and acceptance in Christ and His Word, so resist over-reading the mechanics of the Urim and Thummim.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The Urim and Thummim were God's provision for seeking His will (28:30).
- The gold plate let the priest bear guilt so worship would be accepted (28:38).
- God provided both guidance and accepted worship; neither was self-secured.
- Guidance now comes through Christ and the completed Word (Hebrews 1:1-2; 2 Timothy 3:16-17).
- Acceptance comes through Christ, who makes us and our worship acceptable (1 Peter 2:5).

Discussion Prompts

- What do these provisions reveal about God's desire to be known and approached?
- How has God's guidance come to us now, compared with the Urim and Thummim?
- What does it mean that even worship needs a mediator to be accepted?

Question 6

Student Question:

Read 28:38 again. Even Israel's holy gifts carried guilt that had to be borne by the priest before they could be accepted. What does this say about the imperfection clinging even to your best offerings to God, and how does it drive you to rest in a Mediator who makes you and your worship acceptable?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-question lingers on the sobering note of 28:38: even 'the holy things' the people consecrated carried guilt that the priest had to bear before they could be accepted. Israel's best gifts, their offerings set apart for God, were still touched by sin.

This exposes a truth we resist: imperfection clings even to our highest devotion. Our prayers wander, our worship is mixed with pride or distraction, our service is laced with self. If even the holy gifts needed a mediator to make them acceptable, so do ours.

Far from leading to despair, this should drive us to Christ. He is the one who bears the guilt clinging to our worship and presents us acceptable to God. Our access does not rest on the purity of our offering but on the perfection of our Priest (Hebrews 13:15; 1 Peter 2:5; Ephesians 1:6).

Press the student to honesty. Where has he assumed his worship or service was acceptable on its own merit? And where might discouragement over his imperfect devotion lift if he saw that Christ makes even flawed offerings acceptable? The aim is humble, grateful rest in the Mediator.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Even Israel's holy gifts carried guilt that had to be borne (28:38).
- Imperfection clings even to our best worship and service.
- Our access rests on the perfection of our Priest, not the purity of our offering.
- Christ bears the guilt of our worship and presents us acceptable (1 Peter 2:5).
- This truth humbles pride and lifts discouragement alike.

Discussion Prompts

- Where have you assumed your worship was acceptable on its own merit?
- How does it free you that Christ makes even imperfect offerings acceptable?
- What would humble, grateful rest in the Mediator look like for you?

Question 7

Student Question:

Read 29:1–9. Before Aaron could serve, he had to be washed with water, clothed in the holy garments, and anointed with oil. What does this ordination process teach about the truth that no one is fit to draw near to God on his own, but must be cleansed, clothed, and set apart by God Himself?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Chapter 29 turns from the garments to the ordination, the consecration of Aaron and his sons. The process begins with washing: 'you shall bring Aaron and his sons to the entrance of the tent of meeting and wash them with water' (29:4). Then they are clothed in the holy garments (29:5–6) and anointed with oil (29:7).

The order is instructive. Before a man could serve, he had to be cleansed, clothed, and set apart, and none of it was self-administered. God prescribed each step; Moses performed it. The priest did not make himself fit; he was made fit by a process God ordained.

This teaches that no one is qualified to draw near to God on his own. Even Aaron, chosen and honored, had to be washed and consecrated. Fitness for God's service is conferred, not native. The washing pictures cleansing, the garments picture a righteousness put on, the anointing pictures being set apart and equipped.

Teach the principle without anachronism: this was Israel's ordination, not Christian baptism, and we must not read New Testament baptism back into Aaron's washing. The abiding lesson is that approaching God requires cleansing, clothing, and consecration that God Himself provides, fully and finally in Christ, who cleanses us, clothes us in His righteousness, and sets us apart for God (Titus 3:5; Galatians 3:27; Hebrews 10:10).

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Ordination required washing, robing, and anointing, all prescribed by God (29:4-7).
- No one is fit to serve God on his own; fitness is conferred, not native.
- Washing pictures cleansing; garments, righteousness; oil, being set apart.
- This was Israel's ordination, not Christian baptism; avoid reading the NT back into it.
- God provides cleansing, clothing, and consecration fully in Christ (Titus 3:5; Hebrews 10:10).

Discussion Prompts

- Why was the priest washed, clothed, and anointed before he could serve?
- What does it mean that fitness for God's service is conferred, not native?
- How does God provide this cleansing and consecration for us in Christ?

Question 8

Student Question:

Read 29:4-7. Washing, robing, anointing: God Himself prepared and consecrated the priest. When you are tempted to feel disqualified, unclean, or unfit to come before God, how does it steady you to remember that your fitness to draw near is something God provides in Christ and not something you manufacture?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-question applies the ordination to the believer's heart, especially to the one who feels unworthy. Aaron did not prepare himself; God washed, robed, and anointed him (29:4-7). His fitness to draw near was entirely God's doing.

Many believers carry a quiet sense of disqualification: too sinful, too inconsistent, too unclean to come near God. The ordination of Aaron answers that the right way: not by telling the unfit to clean themselves up, but by showing that God Himself makes His servants fit.

In Christ, our cleansing, our righteous standing, and our consecration are gifts. We are washed (1 Corinthians 6:11), clothed in Christ (Galatians 3:27), and made a holy priesthood (1 Peter 2:9). When we feel unfit, the remedy is not to manufacture worthiness but to look to what God has provided.

Steady the student here. The gospel does not tell him he is fit because he is impressive; it tells him he is made fit because Christ is. Press him to name where a sense of unfitness has kept him from drawing near, and to anchor his confidence in Christ's provision rather than his own performance (Hebrews 10:19–22).

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Aaron's fitness to serve was God's doing, not his own (29:4–7).
- Many believers feel disqualified, unclean, or unfit to come near God.
- In Christ we are washed, clothed, and consecrated as gifts (1 Corinthians 6:11; Galatians 3:27).
- The remedy for feeling unfit is to look to God's provision, not manufacture worthiness.
- Confidence rests on Christ's fitness, not our performance (Hebrews 10:19–22).

Discussion Prompts

- Where has a sense of being unfit kept you from drawing near to God?
- How does it steady you that God Himself makes His servants fit?
- What would it look like to anchor your confidence in Christ rather than your record?

Question 9

Student Question:

Read 29:10–21 with Hebrews 7:23–28 and 10:1–14. Aaron's ordination required a bull and two rams, blood applied and sprinkled, repeated year after year, because the old priests 'were prevented by death from continuing in office' and their sacrifices could 'never take away sins.' How does the Aaronic priesthood, with its endless blood and dying priests, point us to Christ our great High Priest, who offered Himself once for all and lives forever, and why must we not reinstate this priesthood today?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest block. Chapter 29 details the ordination sacrifices: a bull as a sin offering, with Aaron and his sons laying hands on its head (29:10–14); a ram for a burnt offering (29:15–18); and a second ram, the ram of ordination, whose blood was put on the right ear, right

thumb, and right big toe of Aaron and his sons, then sprinkled on them and their garments (29:19–21). This consecration was repeated for seven days (29:35–37), and the daily sacrifices continued thereafter (29:38–42).

Two facts in this picture cry out for something better. First, the priests themselves needed atonement: the bull was a sin offering for Aaron and his sons (29:14, 36). The mediators were sinners. Second, the sacrifices never ended. Day after day, year after year, the blood flowed, because, as Hebrews says, 'it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins' (Hebrews 10:4). The very repetition proved the inadequacy.

Hebrews 7:23–28 draws the contrast directly. The former priests 'were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office,' but Jesus 'holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever' (Hebrews 7:23–24). Unlike Aaron, He 'has no need... to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself' (Hebrews 7:27). He is holy, innocent, unstained, a Priest who needed no sin offering of His own.

Hebrews 10:1–14 completes the picture. The law's repeated sacrifices were 'a shadow of the good things to come' that could never perfect the worshiper, but Christ, 'after offering for all time a single sacrifice for sins... sat down at the right hand of God,' for 'by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified' (Hebrews 10:12, 14). What Aaron's endless blood could never finish, Christ finished once.

Teach plainly that we do not reinstate this priesthood or its sacrifices. They are fulfilled and set aside in Christ (Hebrews 8–10; Colossians 2:14–17). We have no earthly altar to rebuild, no Levitical priest to ordain, no animal blood to offer. Christ is our only High Priest, after the order of Melchizedek, who lives forever and through whom we draw near. Every Christian is a priest only in the spiritual sense of offering spiritual sacrifices through Him, praise, prayer, a yielded life (1 Peter 2:5, 9; Revelation 1:6; Romans 12:1; Hebrews 13:15). Keep the typology disciplined and let Hebrews set the agenda; the point is not to decode every drop of blood but to glory in the better Priest and His finished work.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Ordination required a bull and two rams, blood applied and sprinkled (29:10–21).
- The priests themselves needed a sin offering; the mediators were sinners (29:14).
- The endless repetition proved the sacrifices could not take away sin (Hebrews 10:4).
- Jesus holds His priesthood permanently because He lives forever (Hebrews 7:23–25).
- Christ offered Himself once for all and perfected His people (Hebrews 7:27; 10:14).
- We do not reinstate this priesthood; it is fulfilled and set aside in Christ (Hebrews 8–10).
- Christians are priests only spiritually, offering sacrifices through Christ (1 Peter 2:5, 9).

Discussion Prompts

- How does the priests' own need for atonement point us to a better Priest?
- What does the endless repetition of sacrifices reveal, and how does Christ end it?
- Why must we not reinstate the Aaronic priesthood and its sacrifices today?

Question 10

Student Question:

Read 29:42–46, where God promises, 'I will dwell among the people of Israel and will be their God,' and look back across these two chapters. Naming the priesthood, the garments, the names borne on heart and shoulder, the washing and anointing and atoning blood, all of it fulfilled in Christ, name one specific way the Lord Jesus, your great High Priest, is forming you to draw near to God with confidence and to live as one He carries and intercedes for.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The capstone returns to the goal of it all, stated in 29:42–46. Behind the garments, the names, the washing, the anointing, and the blood lies God's covenant aim: 'I will dwell among the people of Israel and will be their God. And they shall know that I am the LORD their God, who brought them out of the land of Egypt that I might dwell among them' (29:45–46). The whole priestly system existed so that a holy God could dwell with His people.

That aim is now fulfilled. God dwells among His people in the church, built together 'into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit' (Ephesians 2:19–22), and will dwell with them fully and forever in the new heavens and new earth (Revelation 21:3). The priesthood that made nearness possible has given way to the Priest who makes it complete.

This question asks the student to look back across both chapters, the garments for glory, the names borne on shoulder and heart, the Urim and gold plate, the washing and anointing, the atoning blood, and to see Christ as the substance of every shadow. Our great High Priest carries us, intercedes for us, makes us acceptable, and brings us near to a God who delights to dwell with us.

Press for one specific, concrete formation, not vague appreciation. Perhaps the student needs to draw near with new confidence because Christ is his Priest. Perhaps he needs to stop trusting his own worthiness and rest in the One who makes him fit. Perhaps he needs to live as one carried, by name, on the heart of his Priest. End on worship: these chapters of stones and bells and blood are finally about a God who made a way to dwell with sinners, and a Christ who is that way. The fitting response is glad, reverent, confident drawing near (Hebrews 4:14–16; 10:22).

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The whole system existed so a holy God could dwell with His people (29:45–46).

- God now dwells with His people in the church and finally in the new creation (Ephesians 2:19–22; Revelation 21:3).
- Christ is the substance of every shadow: He carries, intercedes, and makes us acceptable.
- Formation should be specific and concrete, not vague appreciation.
- The fitting response is glad, reverent, confident drawing near (Hebrews 4:14–16).

Discussion Prompts

- What was God's ultimate aim behind the whole priestly system (29:45–46)?
- Which part of these chapters most helps you see Christ as your High Priest?
- Name one specific way Christ is forming you to draw near with confidence.