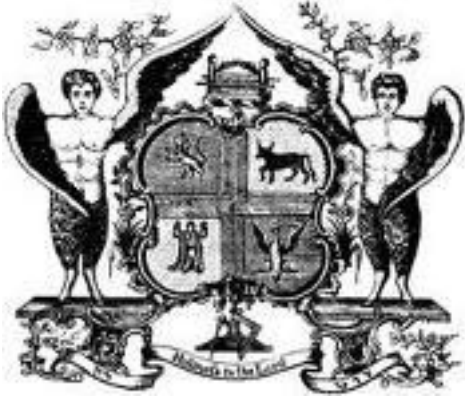


# Royal Arch



QuickTime™ and a decompressor are needed to see this picture.

## **THE BREASTPLATE OF THE HIGH PRIEST**

By H. Meij H.P. Tokyo Chapter #1, R.A.M.

"And Aaron shall bear the names of the children of Israel in the breastplate of judgment upon his heart when he goeth in unto the holy place for a memorial before the Lord continually" [Exodus 28.29]

Aaron was the first high priest and was Moses' brother. After Aaron died, subsequent high priests were his descendants, known as the sons of Aaron. The High Priest was the most glorious Jewish position. His representative dress was said to be "for glory and for beauty." It was made according to the design given by God to Moses. Only certain special people were allowed to make the garment as the following verse indicates:

"And thou shalt speak unto all that are wise-hearted, whom I have filled with the spirit of wisdom, that they may make Aaron's garments to consecrate him that he may minister unto me in the priest's office"[v. 3].

The role of the breastplate becomes clear in the following text:

"Aaron shall bear the names of the children of Israel in the breastplate of judgment upon his

heart when he goeth in unto the holy place, for a memorial before the Lord continually"

### **Why is the Breastplate so important?:**

The breastplate was of great importance because by means of it, God revealed his Divine will to His chosen people. It was designed by God Himself and the directions as to how it was to be made were given to Moses as illustrated in Exodus xxviii. 15, 20.

QuickTime™ and a decompressor are needed to see this picture.

The King James Authorized Version of the Bible (1769) translated the Hebrew work "chosen" as breastplate, but this obscures some of its meaning. In the Septuagint it is written by the Greek word "logeion," which means a speaking-place. This describes exactly what the breastplate really was--- the oracle or means by which God spoke to, i.e., answered the inquires of, the high-priest.

### **What did the Breastplate look like?:**

The breastplate was clearly designed with the idea that the names of the twelve tribes engraved on the stones should be brought before God "as a continual memorial," and that Aaron should "bear them upon his heart, when he went into the most holy place." (Exodus xxviii. 12, 29). When we look at the breastplate as we use in our ritual, we find it to be made of metal with 12 gems. However, in reality, according to the Bible, the breastplate, or, as it is further named, the breastplate of judgment was, like the inner curtains of the Tabernacle, of "cunning work," which means that it was the work of a skilled weaver. The material with which it was woven consisted of threads of gold and blue, purple and scarlet linen threads. The number of the threads and the order of the colors were, according to the "Targums" one of gold, six of blue, six of purple, and six of scarlet.

### **The Urim and Thummim:**

The breastplate was actually made of two pieces, which formed a sort of purse, or bag, in which also was kept the two sacred stones, named the Urim (representing light and excellence) and the Thummim (representing perfection and completion). These stones were some divinely appointed instruments by which the High Priest inquired of God about matters concerning the welfare of the Children of Israel. The Bible makes several references to these miraculous stones, but not anything physical, like the shape or size.

QuickTime™ and a decompressor are needed to see this picture.

They were probably two jewels. When someone had to make an important decision, the request was made known to the high priest. He would stand before the lampstand near the altar, holding

the Urim in one hand and the Thummin in the other. As the light from the candle reflected from the Urim and the Thummin onto the stones of the Breastplate, this flash of light provided up to 24 combinations (2 x 12). Since there are 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet, the flashes of light could produce strings of letters. It was said that God breathed through the wind, which in turn causes the veil to move, permitting a breeze to flicker the flames in the Lampstand to momentarily alter the angle of direction of the light onto the Urim and Thummin, and thence to the Breastplate. Thus God was able to communicate directly, but not audibly, to the high priest and answer the enquiry.

**Which stones were on the breastplate?:**

Upon the breastplate were set four rows of precious stones, three in each row, and upon them were engraved the names of the twelve tribes, and as the great Jewish historian Josephus adds, "in the order of their birth", but we are not told which stone to which tribe. So which stones were used? This is a 2,000 year old question. Although the Hebrew names of the 12 stones are not in question, their translation is, and despite numerous attempts, the various translators cannot, to date, agree to a single translation. G. W. Kunz in "The Curious Lore of Precious Stones" says "In the Midrash Bemidbar, the Rabbinical commentary on numbers, the tribes are given in their order, with the stones appropriate to each and the color of the tribal standard pitched in the desert camp, this color corresponding in each case with that of the tribal stone."

In general, however, the following composite is most accepted:

Judah Sardius (Red)	Issachar Topaz (Pale green)	Zebulon Carbuncle (Deep red)
Reuben Emerald (Green)	Simeon Sapphire (Deep blue)	Gad Diamond (Transparent)
Ephraim Ligure (Dull red)	Manasseh Agate (Gray)	Benjamin Amethyst (Purple)

Dan	Asher	Naphtali
Beryl	Onyx	Jasper
(bluish green)	(Bluish white)	(Green)

For in the Bible we learn that:

"And thou shalt set in it settings of stones, even four rows of stones: the first row shall be a sardius, a topaz, and a carbuncle: this shall be the first row.

And the second row shall be an emerald, a sapphire, and a diamond. And the third row a ligure, an agate, and an amethyst. And the fourth row a beryl, and an onyx, and a jasper; they shall be set in gold in their enclosings.

And the stones shall be with the names of the children of Israel, twelve, according to their names, like the engravings on a signet; every one with his name shall they be according to the twelve tribes....

And Aaron shall bear the names of the children of Israel in the breastplate of judgement upon his heart, when he goeth in unto the holy place, for a memorial before the Lord continually."

### **The Dress of the High Priest:**

The awesome responsibility of the high Priest required a sanctified person (Exodus 29), dressed in "holy garments". The uppermost holy garment is apron-like and is called the Ephod. On top of the Ephod there is the square breastplate, with the twelve precious stones. On each shoulder-piece of the Ephod was a precious stone. Six names were written on each of the stones, altogether naming the twelve tribes of Israel. Every time the high priest went before God at the Golden Incense Altar, the names of all the people of God were upon His shoulders.

The blue garment is called the robe, under which the high priest wore a white fine linen woven tunic. On his head is the white fine linen turban. Round the base of the turban is the crown of gold, with the inscription "HOLY TO THE LORD". This dress passed to his successor at his death.

QuickTime™ and a  
decompressor  
are needed to see this picture.

QuickTime™ and a  
decompressor  
are needed to see this picture.

## **References in the Bible:**

URIM and Thummim

- 1) Placed in the breastplate of the high priest # Ex 28:30 Le 8:8
- 2) God to be consulted by # Nu 27:21
- 3) Instances of consulting God by # Jud 1:1 20:18,28 1Sa 23:9-11 30:7,8
- 4) Sometimes no answer by # 1Sa 28:6
- 5) Were wanting in the second temple # Ezr 2:63 Ne 7:65
- 6) Illustrative of the light and perfection of Christ, the true high priest # De 33:8

Joh 1:4,9,17 Col 2:3

## **Bibliography:**

The Breastplate of the High Priest: Which Tribe to Which Jewel?, by F. Graham Millar

Dress & Breastplate of the High Priest, by Edward Rogers Gearheart

Freemason's Book of the Royal Arch, by Bernard E. Jones

A Dictionary of Freemasonry, by Robert Macoy

The High Priest and his garments, by Martyn Barrow

The Curious Lore of Precious Stones, by G. W. Kunz