

In preparation for the Tabernacle display at Scentsy Commons, the Meridian Idaho North Stake Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints requested that several members of the Stake write research papers on various subjects relating to the ancient Tabernacle revealed to Moses in the Old Testament. The authors of these nine papers are not Bible scholars, but spent significant time, effort, and prayer as they studied their subjects and honed their messages. Their hope was to provide meaningful information for readers of all faiths and backgrounds who want to gain a deeper understanding of the doctrine and symbolism of Jesus Christ surrounding the Tabernacle. The authors' intent was for the writings to be from a Christian perspective, yet free from bias towards any one Christian religion. Further, the facts and opinions represented in these papers are the work of the individual authors and do not necessarily represent the doctrine and teachings of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints or its leaders.

We welcome your questions or feedback on how we can improve the content of these research papers:
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Clothing of the Priests and the High Priest - Executive Summary

By Daniel Smith

The wearing of symbolic robes, in large part, has its roots in the clothing that the Lord prescribed for the ancient priests of the Tabernacle. This special clothing was used to represent the idea that the priests and high priest were set apart, that their power came from God, and that they had been designated to act on behalf of Israel. The clothing also was a type and shadow of the future mission and atonement of the Savior Jesus Christ.

Because of Israel's fear to enter God's presence, and their sin of worshiping the golden calf, God in His mercy established the family of Levi, and in particular the family of Aaron as intercessors before the Lord. The priests, or the descendants of Aaron, would act on behalf of the people, offering sacrifices, and entering and worshiping in the Tabernacle, representing all of Israel. As the leader of his family, Aaron was designated as the first high priest, or the leading priest, and the only one who could enter the Holy of Holies. This role of the high priest was to be passed down from Aaron to his oldest son through each of the generations. To help symbolize his important role as a mediator and as a type of the coming Messiah, each piece of the clothing of the high priest was made to point to his significant role.

The high priest wore eight pieces of special clothing, four that were worn by all priests and Levites, and four (often called the golden garments) that were only worn by the high priest. The four garments worn by all priests were made of white linen and were the following:

1. *Undergarments or breeches*. These were to go from the waist to the knees and were to cover the nakedness of the priests.
2. *Robe or tunic*. The robe was seamless according to Jewish tradition.
3. *Sash*. The sash was worn similar to a belt.
4. *Turban*. Sometimes translated as bonnet or cap, this was a long strip of fabric that would be wound around the head.

The four pieces worn by only the high priest were the:

1. *Blue ephod*. This was a seamless blue robe that had bells and pomegranate shape tassels on the bottom of the hem.
2. *Ephod*. The ephod was a type of apron and or vest that had two shoulder stones with the twelve tribes engraved on them, six on each stone. The stones represented that the high priest symbolically carried Israel on his shoulders.
3. *Breastplate*. The breastplate folded in half creating a pocket for the Urim and Thummim. It had twelve stones, one for each of the tribes, fastened to the breastplate. This was to represent that Israel was near the heart of the high priest. The ephod and breastplate were woven from threads of gold, purple, blue, scarlet, and white.
4. *Crown*. The crown was a gold band that was tied to the forehead with blue ribbons. Engraved on the front were the words "Holiness to the Lord".

Each of the pieces of the clothing was designed to point to the Savior and his ultimate mission. The colors also related to the attributes and characteristics of Christ. Gold represented divinity. Purple royalty, blue represented heaven, red atonement, and white purity.

God desires that all of His children enter back into His presence. However, like the children of Israel who built the golden calf, we all have sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God. We each are unable and unworthy to enter on, our own merits, back into the presence of God. It is as if each of us are at the base of Mount Sinai, desiring to know God, but fearing to enter His presence. Because of our sins, God in His mercy sent His only Begotten Son, to intercede on our behalf. Just like the ancient high priest who

symbolically bore the weight of all Israel on his shoulders and heart, so too the Savior bares our sins and sorrows and by His grace and perfection, we are enabled to enter back into God's presence.

Clothing of the Priests and the High Priest

The wearing of special clothing or robes can often symbolize our knowledge, power, rank, or authority. For example, we don graduation robes upon completing a degree to symbolize the new knowledge we have learned. A judge wears a robe to signify his or her power to make judgement over another individual. Many religious leaders will likewise wear robes to represent their authority or status within their particular congregation. This symbol of knowledge, power, and authority through the wearing of robes or special clothing, in large part, has its roots in the clothing that the Lord prescribed for the ancient priests of the Tabernacle. This special clothing was used to represent that the priests and high priest were set apart, that their power came from God, and that they had been designated to act on behalf of Israel. The clothing also was a type and shadow of the future mission and atonement of the Savior Jesus Christ.

After Israel crossed the Red Sea and came to Mount Sinai, the Lord desired that all His people be able to enter into His presence. The Lord commanded Moses to consecrate the people and to have them wash their clothing and prepare themselves before coming into His presence (Exodus 19:10-12). After three days of preparation, Mount Sinai was covered in smoke and lightning as God prepared to come down to meet His people. Exodus 20 reads: “And all the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking: and when the people saw it, they removed, and stood afar off. And they said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die.” (Exodus 20:18-19). Because of the people’s fear to enter the presence of the Lord, Moses instead went up into the mountain to learn from and be instructed by the Lord. However, because Moses tarried as he communed with God, the people desiring to worship but not being willing to wait, ~~instead~~ built a golden calf reverting back to their old religious habits while in Egypt.

Because of Israel’s fear to enter God’s presence, and their sin of worshiping the golden calf, God in His mercy established the family of Levi, and in particular the family of Aaron as intercessors before the Lord. The priests, or the descendants of Aaron, would act on behalf of the people, offering sacrifices, and entering and worshiping in the Tabernacle, representing all of Israel. As the leader of his family, Aaron was designated as the first high priest, or the leading priest, and the only one who could enter the Holy of Holies. This role of the high priest was to be passed down from Aaron to his oldest son through each of the generations. To help symbolize his important role as a mediator and as a type of the coming Messiah, each piece of the clothing of the high priest was made to point to his significant role. In Exodus 28, these special and beautiful clothing that Aaron was to wear, are described in great detail.

PRIESTLY CLOTHING	
<i>All Priests</i>	<i>Only the High Priest</i>
Undergarments	Blue robe
Tunic	Ephod
Sash	Breastplate
Turban	Golden crown

“The high priest wore eight holy garments. Of these, four were of the same type worn by all priests, and four were unique to the high priest.”¹ The four garments worn by all priests were, first, the priestly undergarments or breeches. These linen pants were made to “cover the nakedness” of the priests and covered them from the waist to the knees (Exodus 28:42). Second, was the priestly tunic or robe, which was likewise made of white linen, was seamless, and covered most of the body of the priest (Exodus 28:39-40). Third, was the priestly sash, made of white linen for the normal priest, and an embroidered sash made of gold, blue, purple, scarlet, and white for the high priest, and was used as a type of belt

¹ High Priest of Israel, Wikipedia

around the tunic or robe. Fourth, is the priestly turban, bonnet, or cap, which was a long strip of white linen wrapped around the head of the priest.



The four golden garments worn by only the high priest were, first the priestly blue robe, which was a sleeveless and seamless robe that was about a hand breadth shorter than the white full-length robe. On the bottom of the blue robe were alternating golden bells and pomegranate-shaped tassels made of blue, purple, and scarlet wool. Second, was the ephod, “a richly embroidered vest or apron with two onyx engraved gemstones on the shoulders, on which were engraved the names of the tribes of Israel.”² Third, was the breastplate, which had twelve different stones in gold settings, fastened to the breastplate, each engraved with one of the names of the tribes of Israel. The breastplate was folded in half to create a pocket where the Urim and Thummim was stored. The fabric for both the ephod and the breastplate were woven from gold thread, blue, purple, and scarlet wool, and white linen. The breastplate was fastened on the top by gold-twisted chains attached to the two shoulder stones, and on the bottom by blue ribbons tied to the ephod. The last of the golden garments of the high priest was the crown, worn over the front of the turban and attached to the forehead by two blue ribbons, the crown being inscribed with the words “Holiness to the Lord” (Exodus 28:36-38).



² High Priest of Israel, Wikipedia

Each of the pieces of clothing, including their materials and colors, pointed to Jesus the Messiah, the Great High Priest, who like the ancient priests, intercedes on behalf of Israel. First, we'll discuss the four white linen vestments. White in the Bible represents purity, while the Hebrew word that was often used for linen can mean 'separation.'³ Purity and separation from the world are both perfect symbols of the life of Christ.⁴ John, remembering the white seamless robe worn by the priests, tells us that at the cross Jesus likewise wore a seamless robe (see John 19:23).



On the blue outer robe were attached alternating bells and pomegranate tassels. As the high priest would walk around the bells would ring, reminding everyone around him, that they were in the presence of the high priest, the representative of the Lord. The pomegranate in the scriptures represented fruitfulness, posterity, and prosperity, as there are literally hundreds of seeds in a single fruit. It is through the atonement of the Messiah that we are all made children of Christ, and heirs of His kingdom.



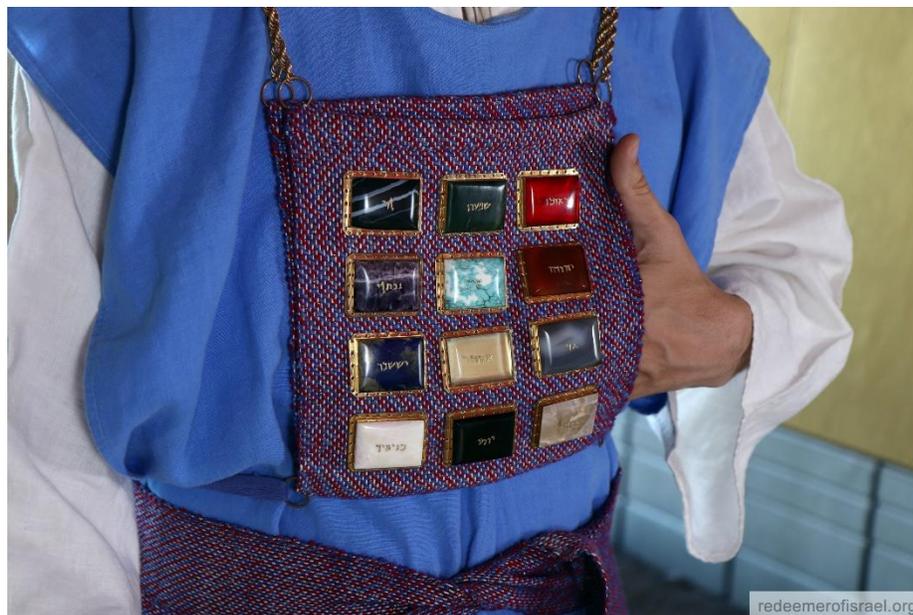
³ Linen, BibleStudyTools.com

⁴ Revelation 15:6 speaks of the seven angels being likewise clothed in white linen

“In the scriptures ... the forehead represents what a person’s thoughts dwell on and therefore what he loves or desires. ... For the same reason, the Mosaic high priest wore an engraved gold signet on his forehead that read ‘Holiness to the Lord’ (see Exodus 28:36-38). This was a reminder that his thoughts should always be holy, with the result that his actions would follow suit.”⁵

Perhaps the most significant and expensive part of the high priest’s clothing was the ephod and the breastplate. According to the Bible, the stones on the two shoulders, engraved with the twelve tribes of Israel, were to represent that the high priest was to symbolically bear or carry Israel upon his shoulders at all times. The twelve stones on the breastplate, likewise, represented that he was to carry Israel against his heart (see Exodus 28:12, 29-30). As Christ atoned in the Garden of Gethsemane, and died on the cross of Calvary He literally carried all of the world on His shoulders and against His heart.

The blue robe, the ephod and the breastplate were all made of linen and wool, and of the same five colors; gold, blue, purple, scarlet, and white. Linen again represented ‘separation’ from the world, while wool was connected to the sheep that were used in so many of the temple sacrifices.



Gold in the scriptures can represent wealth, power, the celestial realm, and the divine.⁶ Blue often represents all things heavenly, being the color of the sky. The priest’s outer robe being entirely blue could emphasize “the fact that his authority was of heavenly origin and his life was the typifying of God and Christ.”⁷ The color purple can represent royalty, power, wealth, and majesty. Producing purple dye in ancient times was extremely costly and difficult, meaning that only the wealthiest could afford to wear the color purple.⁸ It is interesting to note that Christ, according to Mark and John, was clothed in a purple robe by the soldiers before His crucifixion in an effort to mock Him as the King of the Jews (see Mark 15:17 and John 19:2-3). The color scarlet, or red often represents sin, mortality, death and resurrection.⁹ In the same account of the mocking soldiers, Matthew tells us that the robe was scarlet (see Matthew

⁵ *The Lost Language of Symbolism*, by Alonzo L. Gaskill, page 39 (see Forehead)

⁶ *The Lost Language of Symbolism*, page 91-93 (see Gold)

⁷ *The Lost Language of Symbolism*, page 89-90 (see Blue)

⁸ *The Lost Language of Symbolism*, page 96-99 (see Purple), also see Esther 6:7-8, 8:15 when Mordecai is dressed in a purple robe to represent the royal favor of the king.

⁹ *The Lost Language of Symbolism*, page 99-102 (see Red/Scarlet)

27:28). In addition, the book of Revelation depicts Christ at His Second Coming wearing a robe dipped in blood, making it the color red (see Revelation 19:13). White can represent purity and typifies the type of life that Christ lived.

Just as the five colors were fully interwoven and united into one single piece of cloth, so too the attributes of Christ (typified by each of the colors), were combined into one, to demonstrate the saving grace of Christ, the number five often representing God's grace in the scriptures.¹⁰ Each attribute on its own is powerful, but only when they are all interwoven together is the true power of the atonement realized. The fact that the twelve precious stones, representing Israel, were fastened to the breastplate, which can symbolize the attributes of Christ, teaches us that we, as Israel, are each bound to Christ and made one with Him because of His perfect life and infinite atonement.



God desires that all of His children enter back into His presence. However, like the children of Israel who built the golden calf, we all have sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God. We each are unable and unworthy to enter on our own merits back into the presence of God. It is as if we each are at the base of Mount Sinai, desiring to know God, but fearing to enter His presence. Because of our sins, God in His mercy sent His only Begotten Son, to intercede on our behalf. Just like the ancient high priest who symbolically bore the weight of all Israel on his shoulders and heart, so too the Savior bares our sins and sorrows and by His grace and perfection, we are enabled to enter back into God's presence.

As the writer of Hebrews wrote, "Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." (Hebrews 4:14-16).¹¹

¹⁰ The number 5, The Bible Study Site

¹¹ The book of Hebrews mentions the term 'high priest' 20 times, and is by far the best scriptural source for teaching about the relationship between the High Priest and Jesus Christ.