

The Precious Gems of the Breastplate (1)

Throughout the Old Testament Scriptures the virtues and glories of the person and work of Lord Jesus Christ are brought before us in wonderful picture and type. Of all those pictures and types, perhaps none express the majestic beauties and glories of our blessed Lord Jesus, quite like the garments of the high priest.

In particular, it is the precious stones, or gems on the shoulders of the high priest and those that were on the breastplate, that we shall consider. These, individually and collectively, bring before us the majesty and splendour of the Lord Jesus in various aspects of His divine person.

But first of all, let us consider the robe and the breastplate worn by the high priest, as he ministered about the holy things in the service of the tabernacle, God's dwelling place on earth. There was a hole in the top of the robe of the high priest, with a binding of woven work round about it so that it would not be rent, or torn (Ex. 28:32).

It is amazing to read of the robe of the Lord Jesus, for which the soldiers gambled beneath His cross, in fulfillment of the sacred Scriptures (Ps. 22:18). Like the robe of Israel's earthly high priest, it was without seam, woven from the top throughout, so that it could not be rent (Jn. 19:23-24). This would remind us of His sinless perfection, and all of the divine attributes of God resident, indisputably and indissolubly in Him.

Around the hem of the robe of the high priest, were golden bells and pomegranates, so that his sound was heard as he moved about in priestly service (Ex. 28:33-35). The golden bells remind us of the deity of the Lord Jesus. All that He said and all that He did, declared, as the apostle Paul described, "*all the fullness of the Godhead bodily*" (Col. 2:9).

The pomegranates would speak to us of the fragrance of a life that ever brought pleasure and delight to His heavenly Father (Isa. 42:1; Matt. 3:17, 17:5; Luke 3:22, 9:35; Jn. 8:29). They would also remind us of a life of fruitfulness in accomplishing the Father's will (Jn. 4:34, 6:38, 17:4).

The breastplate was made of gold, blue, purple, scarlet and fine twined linen (Ex. 28:15). The gold symbolizes the deity of the Lord Jesus. Paul wrote of Him, "*in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily*" (Col. 2:9). Matthew, the gospel writer, quoted from the prophecy of Isaiah concerning the name of Emmanuel, given to the Lord to the Lord Jesus, before He was born, meaning, "*God with us*" (Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:23).

The blue speaks to us of the heavenly character of the Lord Jesus. He said, "*I came down from heaven*" (Jn. 6:38, 51). Paul referred to the Lord Jesus as the second man and said, He is "*the Lord from heaven*" (1st Cor. 15:47). John reminds us, "*he that cometh from heaven is above all*" (Jn. 3:31).

The purple indicates the royal glories of the King. Paul wrote concerning Him, "*Which in his times he shall shew, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords*" (1st Tim. 6:15). In the book of the Revelation, John described Him, "*he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, King Of Kings, And Lord Of Lords*" (Rev. 19:16).

Above His head on the cross, these words were inscribed, "*Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews*". When the chief priests urged Pilate, the Roman governor to change the wording, he replied, "*what I have written, I have written*" (Jn. 19:19-22). The rulers of the world raged against the Lord and against His anointed. The Lord declared, "*Yet have I set (anointed) my king upon my holy hill of Zion*" (Ps. 2:1-6).

The scarlet tells us of His suffering and glory. While the scarlet might remind us of His precious blood shed on account of our sin, and the sufferings He endured on the cross, it also

reminds of His ultimate triumph and victory, over sin and death and hell, highlighted in His glorious resurrection out from amongst the dead.

In the colour scarlet, we also see the glory that is His as a result of His suffering and His carrying out the will of God in accomplishing the work of redemption. Peter wrote of the Old Testament prophets, who enquired about these things, *“Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow”* (1st Pet. 1:11).

The writer of the epistle to the Hebrews wrote concerning the Lord Jesus, *“who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God”* (Heb. 12:2). The Lord Jesus asked the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, *“Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?”* (Luke 24:26).

The fine twined linen brings before us the perfect righteousness of the Lord Jesus. Paul wrote concerning the Lord Jesus that He knew no sin (2nd Cor. 5:21). Peter wrote of Him, *“who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth”* (1st Pet. 2:22). John declared, *“in him is no sin”* (1st Jn. 3:5). The writer of the epistle to the Hebrews stated concerning Him, *“who is holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners”* (Heb. 7:26).

We read that the breastplate was foursquare (Ex. 28:16), reminding us of the universal authority of the Lord Jesus (Matt. 28:18; Eph. 1:17). It was double, indicating the strength and power that lay behind His authority. Joseph informed Pharaoh that his dream was doubled unto him because the events that he had seen were established by God (Gen. 41:32). The Lord Jesus said, *“all power is given unto me in heaven and in earth”* (Matt. 28:18).

Its measure was a span. Isaiah tells us that the Lord measured the waters in the hollow of His hand and meted out heaven with the span (Isa. 40:12). Some suggest that a span is the measure of a man, and indicates to us the perfect humanity of the Lord Jesus, who is God manifest in flesh (1st Tim. 3:16). The precious stones of the breastplate were set in enclosures of pure gold, bringing before us the glory and absolute deity of the Lord Jesus.

It is interesting to notice that in addition to the gems of the breastplate, there were two onyx stones, one on each of the shoulders of the ephod. These were graven with names of the twelve tribes of Israel; six on each stone. Wonderful images come to mind with regard to the shoulders of the Saviour. Isaiah prophesied, *“the government shall be on his shoulder; and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace”* (Isa. 9:6). While these names describe what He is in essential nature and being, they also describe what He is to us as believers.

Think too, of the shepherd who went out in search of the sheep that was lost and when he found it, he laid it on his shoulders. What a place of protection and affection we, who are His sheep enjoy.

In the will of the Lord, in the next article we will explore in some detail the precious gems of the breastplate, as they relate to the person of our Lord Jesus Christ.

*Radiant splendour doth surround
Our supreme, glorious Lord,
With majesty and might is crowned,
By heaven and earth adored.
And to the Father, fragrance sweet,
From His pure walk ascends;
True righteousness and peace doth meet,
While grace and mercy blends.*

*In holy garments, thus arrayed,
Adorned with golden bell;
His deity on earth displayed,
His truth and goodness tell.*

*Delighting in the Father's will,
A man by God approved;
Determined, in devotion, still,
While to the cross He moved.*

*A perfect, spotless sacrifice,
For sinners, sin was made,
Thus, redemption's required price
By precious blood was paid.*

*The mighty Victor now is named,
And crowned with diadem
His Royal glories thus proclaimed,
In every precious gem.*

Bernie Payne