

CHAPTER FOUR

The High Priest

THE high priest occupied the most exalted place in Israel. He was the only one who could officiate on the Day of Atonement, and he alone could appear before God in the most holy place. By way of pre-eminence he was called the anointed priest, or high priest. (Lev. 4:3; 21:10.) As all lower offices are included in the higher, the high priest stood as the symbol of the whole priesthood. In him all offices centered. In the sanctuary he offered daily. (Heb. 7:27; Lev. 6:19-23.) He cared for the lamps and lit them. (Lev. 24:2-4; Ex. 30:8; Num. 8:2.) He burned incense. (Ex. 30:7, 8.) It was his prerogative to officiate in any part of the ritual personally, and whatever service the priests did was done in behalf of Aaron and for Aaron. The priests were simply his helpers. They might serve at the altar; they might even enter the first apartment, but they did so as his substitute. What they did was counted as if done by Aaron.

The same rules which guided priests in their personal contact with the people as well as in their own lives, also applied to the high priest, and in some respects were even more strict. Thus while the priest might marry only a virgin or a widow, the high priest was forbidden to marry even a widow. (Lev. 21:13, 14.) While a priest might not touch a dead body except

that of a near relative, the high priest might not even do this. (Verses 1, 2, 11.)

This carefulness in all things extended even to the garments, which had symbolic significance. Of the dress which the high priest wore, is written this:

"These are the garments which they shall make; a breastplate, and an ephod, and a robe, and a broidered coat, a mitre, and a girdle: and they shall make holy garments for Aaron thy brother, and his sons, that he may minister unto Me in the priest's office." Ex. 28:4. They harmonized in color and material with the tabernacle itself, and were adorned with precious stones.

The breastplate first mentioned was a "foursquare" garment suspended upon the breast by little chains. In this breastplate were four rows of precious stones of three each, with the names of the children of Israel engraved upon them, one name on each stone. (Verse 21.) This garment was called the "breastplate of judgment," and Aaron was to bear it "upon his heart when he" went in unto the holy place. (Verse 29.)

On the breastplate were also said to be the Urim and Thummim, those two mysterious stones which denoted the Lord's pleasure or displeasure when He was consulted in times of need. (Lev. 8:8; Ex. 28:30; 1 Sam. 28:6.) From the fact that they are said to be *in* the breastplate, some have supposed them to be in a pocket put there for that purpose. It seems better to believe, however, that they were placed prominently on the breastplate, as were the other stones, one on the left side, the other on the right, in full view.

The ephod was a short garment made "of gold, of blue, and of purple, of scarlet, and fine twined linen,

with cunning work." Ex. 28:6. It had no sleeves, and hung down on both breast and back. On the shoulder pieces were two onyx stones with the names of the children of Israel engraved upon them, six names on each stone. "And thou shalt put the two stones upon the shoulders of the ephod for stones of memorial unto the children of Israel: and Aaron shall bear their names before the Lord upon his two shoulders for a memorial." Verse 12.

Underneath the ephod was a long robe made of blue linen, sleeveless and seamless. Around the hem of the skirt were "pomegranates of blue, and of purple, and of scarlet, . . . and bells of gold between them round about. . . . And it shall be upon Aaron to minister: and his sound shall be heard when he goeth in unto the holy place before the Lord, and when he cometh out, that he die not." Verses 33-35. Underneath the robe of the ephod were the ordinary white undergarments and the linen breeches.

The girdle of the high priest was made of gold, blue, purple, and scarlet, the same as the ephod. It was placed around the robe of the ephod, rather high up, and served to hold the garment in place. (Ex. 39:5; 29:5.)

The Golden Garments

"They shall make the ephod of gold." "The curious girdle of the ephod, which is upon it, shall be of the same." "Thou shalt make the breastplate of judgment . . . of gold." "Thou shalt make the robe of the ephod of blue . . . and bells of gold." Ex. 28:6, 8, 15, 31, 33. While these garments were made of different materials, gold formed a prominent part. If to the garments is

added the crown of gold on the miter, on which was written "HOLINESS TO THE LORD," the twelve precious stones with the names of Israel engraved upon them, and the two onyx stones also with Israel's name upon them, and lastly, Urim and Thummim, the whole effect must have been one of glory and beauty. As the high priest would slowly and with dignity move from place to place, the sun's light would be reflected in the sixteen precious jewels, the bells would give forth a musical sound, and the people would be deeply impressed with the solemnity and beauty of God's worship.

These strictly high-priestly garments are generally referred to as golden garments, and were "for glory and for beauty." (Verse 2.) Besides these garments the high priest also had white linen garments which were worn only one day in the year for the expiatory work on the Day of Atonement. (Lev. 16:4, 23.)

The High Priest a Symbol

The high priest in his official capacity was not simply a man. He was an institution; he was a symbol; he was the embodiment of Israel. He bore the names of Israel in the two onyx stones "upon his two shoulders for a memorial"; he carried them in the twelve precious stones "in the breastplate of judgment upon his heart"; he bore "the judgment of the children of Israel upon his heart before the Lord continually." Ex. 28:12, 29, 30. He thus carried Israel both on his shoulders and on his heart. On his shoulders he carried the burden of Israel; in the breastplate, on his heart, the seat of affection and love—the mercy seat—he carried Israel. In the Urim and the Thummim—

"that is, *the Lights and the Perfections*" (verse 30, A.R.V., margin)—he bore "the judgment of the children of Israel upon his heart"; in the golden crown upon the miter inscribed with "HOLINESS TO THE LORD," he bore the "iniquity of the holy things, which the children of Israel shall hallow in all their holy gifts," and this that "they may be accepted before the Lord." (Verses 36-38.)

"The high priest was to act for men in things pertaining to God, 'to make propitiation for the sins of the people' (Heb. 2:17). He was the mediator who ministered for the guilty. 'The high priest represented the whole people. All Israelites were reckoned as being in him. The prerogative held by him belonged to the whole of them (Ex. 19:6) . . .' (Vitranga). That the high priest did represent the whole congregation appears, first from his bearing the tribal names on his shoulders in the onyx stones, and, second, in the tribal names engraved in the twelve gems of the breastplate. The divine explanation of this double representation of Israel in the dress of the high priest is, he 'shall bear their names before Jeh upon his two shoulders for a memorial' (Ex. 28:12, 29). Moreover, his committing heinous sin involved the people in his guilt: 'If the anointed priest shall sin so as to bring guilt on the people' (Lev. 4:3). The LXX reads, 'If the anointed priest shall sin so as to make the people sin.' The anointed priest, of course, is the high priest. When he sinned, the people sinned. His official action was reckoned as their action. The whole nation shared in the trespass of their representative. The converse appears to be just as true. What he did in his official capacity, as prescribed by the Lord, was reckoned as

done by the whole congregation: 'Every high priest . . . is appointed for men' (Heb. 5:1).—*The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, vol. 4, p. 2439, art. "Priest."

The representative character of the high priest should be stressed. Adam was the representative man. When he sinned, the world sinned, and death passed upon all men. (Rom. 5:12.) "By one man's offence death reigned; . . . by one man's disobedience many were made sinners." Verses 17-19.

So likewise Christ, being the second man and the last Adam, was the representative man. "It is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit. . . . The first man is of the earth, earthy; the second man is the Lord from heaven." 1 Cor. 15:45-47. "As by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life." Rom. 5:18. "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous." Verse 19. "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." 1 Cor. 15:22.

The high priest, being in a special sense a figure of Christ, was also the representative man. He stood for all Israel. He carried their burdens and sins. He bore the iniquity of all the holy things. He bore their judgment. When he sinned, Israel sinned. When he made atonement for himself, Israel was accepted.