

THE BREASTPLATE OF THE HIGH PRIEST  
on the Past High Priest Apron  
by Thomas C. Chavez, HP



When you see the High Priest emblem on the Past High Priest Apron, the public can see the Breastplate and if you are asked, you can explain the twelve (12) colored square on the Tau.

*"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.

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 written in Exodus xxviii. 15, 20.

In the Septuagint (Old Testament in Greek), it is written by the Greek word "logeion," which means a speaker's platform. This describes exactly what the breastplate really was - the 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."

When we look at the breastplate, as we use in our ritual, we find it to be made of metal with twelve (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 breastplate was actually made of two pieces, which formed a sort of purse, or bag, in which also was kept two sacred stones. 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. 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. As the light from the candle reflected onto the two (2) stones from the Breastplate, this flash of light provided up to 24 combinations (2 x 12). Since there are twenty-two (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 stones, 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 twelve stones are not in question, the various translators cannot agree to a single translation. However, G. W. Kunz in "The Curious Lore of Precious Stones" says, '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.' Each of the twelve precious stones represented one of the tribes of Israel; thus, every time the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies, he would have the children of Israel on his heart.

What does this speak of but the love that the High Priest and, by extension, God himself, has for His children? Think of what a poignant and perfect picture this is. We are His jewels, and He has us on His heart.