

## The Priesthood Of God (Part 8)

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We are going to begin this sermon by turning to Hebrews 4:1-2 to set a foundation here.

**Hebrews 4:1-2** Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it. For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it.

I am going to proceed again through this series on the priesthood. In the previous sermon we saw that there is a direct connection between holiness and goodness. The term "holy" implies difference, separation, and cleanliness. All three are partly achieved by departing from the evil of this world. The contrast between the world's goodness and this world's evil creates this goodness that is slowly, but surely, becoming God-like. The only way this can be achieved to God's satisfaction is by means of His Holy Spirit. The apostle Paul states that we must walk in the spirit by faith, and to walk indicates motivation and application in life's activities toward the Kingdom of God.

That metaphor is drawn from the example of the Israelites walking for forty years from Egypt to the Promised Land, and all along the way they walked and faced life's trials. However, they did not walk, as we just saw in Hebrews 4:2, in the spirit by faith. Most of the problems were created by their own carnality—events such as the golden calf incident, the uproar that was caused by Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, by their lusting after the priesthood.

And then there was their fear of the people of the land when they refused to cross the border and go in and take the land from the Canaanites. The problems caused by others included the dastardly rear-guard attack of the Amalekites, the devious plot of Balaam and Balak, and the wars of the Edomites and the Moabites as they approached the border of the Promised Land the second time.

They also accomplished some positive things while they were making their walk toward the Promised Land—things such as the construction of the Tabernacle and all of its furniture. They organized the priesthood and all its ceremonies involved in the worship of God, which was centered on the Tabernacle. But overall, as we just saw in these verses, they failed miserably at meeting the challenges of walking in the spirit. These verses in Hebrews 4 present us with a conclusion of a word-picture of dead bodies strewn across the landscape all the way from Egypt to Canaan as a testimony of their utter failure.

We are now going to go to Romans 7:22-23. What Paul writes here is quite a contrast to the Israelites' conduct, behavior, and attitudes in the wilderness.

**Romans 7:22-23** For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.

This was written by a converted man, and he must have been converted about twenty years by this time.

Walking in the spirit begins with and is sustained by the attitude Paul described as "delighting in the law of God after the inward man." This is an energizing desire that triggers the response to live life submitting to God's commands. God clearly shows in what He records of Israel's experiences in the wilderness that they did *not* look upon keeping God's commands as a delight. They fought them all along the way, and they indeed looked upon God's laws as a drag, keeping them from enjoying life.

Being given God's spirit severely blunts our natural enmity against God and His law, and provides us with a respectful awareness of it, a deeper understanding of its purpose, and thus a delight is born in our mind for keeping it. In other words, we really want to do it, but that was not there first.

The carnal mind is enmity against God. That is a truth, but when God gives us His spirit, it begins to prompt in us a desire to keep it. However, one must still make the choice, and then *will* to resist the carnal pull to go one's own way, and to follow through in obedience to God's law. If we choose to do this, the Holy Spirit will then enable us to overcome the drag that the Israelites could not; that is, the downward pull of the law of sin and death.

This is a simple formula by which holiness is produced as one's faith is used. Holiness is not obtained by magic, but by experiential cooperation with God who gives grace to His children who give their cooperation. Now in this case, that grace, that gift, is the power to overcome.

We are now going to go to Hebrews 3:16-19, just leading up to what we read in Hebrews 4.

**Hebrews 3:16** For who, having heard, rebelled? [He is talking about the Israelites in the wilderness. They heard, but then they rebelled.] Indeed, was it not all who came out of Egypt, led by Moses? [All of them, with the exception of Joshua and Caleb.]

**Hebrews 3:17-19** Now with whom was He angry forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose corpses fell in the wilderness? [Remember, I told you that Hebrews 4:1-2 is a conclusion of a word picture of corpses strewn all the way from Egypt to the Promised Land.] And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.

So God provides us with a simple direct overall reason why Israel failed in the wilderness, why they failed to work with God in the creating of holiness, why they failed to walk in the spirit, why they did not produce the holiness God desired, and thus they died in the wilderness. God tells us directly and clearly why. They did not act on the basis of what they knew, which is faith. It says that in Hebrews 4:1. They did not act on the basis of faith.

They heard the gospel. How much depth, I do not know, but there is enough in God's word to accuse them of not responding to the gospel. This example is given on our behalf as a warning, because it applies to us even more that it applied to those who came out of Egypt because the stakes are so much higher, and because God has given us His spirit. He did not give it to them. They had to work on their carnal faith, but God did that in order to give us His example of what it is going to take, and that is to make use of the gift that He freely gives to us.

In Hebrews 10:38 it says, "The just shall live by faith." It is going to take faith to produce holiness. That statement is a statement of fact of what God requires of His children. They *must* live by faith. At

the same time it is a prophesy carrying the force of a command at one and the same time, and if we fail to become holy, it will be because we do not use our faith in daily application. It gets down to something that simple.

In other words, we have to mind our Ps and Qs. We have to mind what He is instructing us as we go along the way—things that we learn from what Israel did, or failed to do; things we see in those who succeeded, like Joshua and Caleb. God has given us the information we use as free moral agents to make the correct choice.

From this point on we are going to continue describing the adornment and the dress of the high priest. We have proceeded through explaining that the white underclothing, called the coat, symbolizes righteousness from the inside out. None of the coat was externally visible except for the bottom portion of the garment, which was ankle length.

The next layer of clothing was the blue robe of dignity and office. The blue apparently symbolized either grace and/or holiness, or maybe both at the same time, and this was a seamless robe having only a hole to allow the head to pass through. As I mentioned, that hole had a special weave to it to make it virtually impossible to be ripped, even though it was cloth, because that weave would keep it in tact. Nobody was going to take his holiness away. Nobody was going to take the dignity of his office away from him.

The blue robe extended down probably to mid-calf, so the white of the under clothing was there, and then we see the second layer of the blue on top of it. And then that blue robe had small gold bells that tinkled when he walked. In between each gold bell was a cloth pomegranate there to keep them from jangling against one another, so that as he walked it made a rather melodic sound. It was not just jangling. It was jing, jing, jing, jing, jing, jing jing. Not clang, clang, clang.

One of the purposes for it was because of what happened to Aaron's two sons—Nadab and Abihu—who died in the process because they sinned before God in taking a profane thing into His Tabernacle. Every time the high priest did his work, he was alone. Nobody was there with him, and so the people had assurance that he was always there. That passes on to Christ. He is our High Priest, and by faith we know He is always there in the presence of God in our behalf, because God's word tells.

Let us go to Exodus 28:5-8.

**Exodus 28:5-10** "They shall take the gold, blue, purple, and scarlet thread, and the fine linen, and they shall make the ephod of gold, blue, purple, and scarlet thread, and fine woven linen, artistically worked. It shall have two shoulder straps joined at its two edges, and so it shall be joined together. And the intricately woven band of the ephod, which is on it, shall be of the same workmanship, made of gold, blue, purple, and scarlet thread, and fine woven linen. "Then you shall take two onyx stones and engrave on them the names of the sons of Israel: six of their names on one stone and six names on the other stone, in order of their birth.

This was the next layer of clothing that was put on following the blue robe, and it is called an ephod. With it also was the curious girdle. These were separate items, but they worked together as part of the three adornments. We are going to consider first the curious girdle.

In modern translations, the girdle is no longer translated as "girdle," but it is usually translated as sash, belt, or band. It is also no longer translated as "curious" either, but rather as "intricately," "artistically," or "skillfully" woven. The girdle's purpose was to be an anchor, pulling and holding things together. It was, in short, a binder. The first thing it did was gather the blue robe, which draped down to just below the knees, and it pulled the robe in against the priest's waist.

Second, is that the breastplate's top was attached to the girdle by way of straps that went over the shoulders and down the back, and attached to the girdle in the back. We are going to leave the girdle for a moment, and then get to the breastplate a little bit later too.

Back to the ephod. It was an article of dress somewhat along the lines of a man's vest or waistcoat, but without any buttons down its front. It was a third layer of clothing. It was sleeveless, and it draped down to about mid-thigh. So we have one down to the ankle, one down to mid-calf, and now we have this third one to mid-thigh. It too was gathered to the waist by the girdle, pulling everything there together around the waist. Its basic material was finely woven linen. There was a pattern to the weave, but unfortunately we do not know its design. We do know that the pattern contained gold thread intermingled with the blue, purple, and scarlet material, and it also had a weave within it of all of these materials.

Now we have a picture of the high priest's clothing, with three visible layers of those three things. We do know that the pattern of the ephod contained gold, blue, purple, and scarlet threads, all artfully brought together into a pattern that served as a backdrop for the breastplate. I mean *real* gold. It was not gold-colored linen. It was real gold that was woven right into the weave.

Go now to Exodus 39:1-5. The design here came right from God.

**Exodus 39:1-5** Of the blue, purple, and scarlet thread they made garments of ministry, for ministering in the holy place, and made the holy garments for Aaron, as the LORD had commanded Moses. He made the ephod of gold, blue, purple, and scarlet thread, and of fine woven linen. And they beat the gold into thin sheets and cut it into threads, to work it in with the blue, purple, and scarlet thread, and the fine linen, into artistic designs. They made shoulder straps for it to couple it together; it was coupled together at its two edges. And the intricately woven band of his ephod that was on it was of the same workmanship, woven of gold, blue, purple, and scarlet thread, and of fine woven linen, as the LORD had commanded Moses.

We will stop here just so you get it clear. The ephod (the vest-like garment) and the breastplate were of the same material and apparently of the same design as well.

Let me back off for just a little bit and give you a few amazing facts about gold. Remember, I said the gold was woven right into the weave. First, as far as I know, gold is the metal that is the least impervious to oxidation. It does not degrade. It will hold its glistening sheen seemingly forever through multiple smeltings. Secondly, pure gold is quite soft, and thus it is fairly easily worked into various useful shapes. It can be beaten into leaves so thin that one grain of it is capable of covering a 56-inch square surface. That is 8 inches by 7 inches. That leaf of gold will, at that time, be only one 282 hundred thousandths of an inch thick.

In Britain and the United States, one grain is standardized as being the same weight as one kernel of wheat. That is extremely light. If you can visualize how big one grain of wheat is, one grain of gold

is going to be exceedingly smaller in order to be the same weight as that grain of wheat. Now that one grain, using today's methods, can be drawn into a wire 500 feet long, and all the while this is being done that gold never stops shining, never loses its sheen.

I have no idea how the Israelites did it, but they smelted the gold. The gold came in gold ornamentation they got from the Egyptians. They smelted the gold in order to purify it. They solidified it, and then beat it somehow into very thin sheets. I do not know how they did it, but then they cut it into strips fine enough so that it could be sewn together with the blue linen, the scarlet linen, and the purple linen, and then into a pattern.

Those people had skill. Thus they had a garment, and the breastplate in colors that figuratively, with the gold, revealed the divinity of God, combined with the blue of God's holiness and grace, combined with the scarlet, which indicates humanity and earthiness. These were then combined with purple, which is the intermediate color of blue and scarlet mixed together, tying everything down. That of course gave a picture of some of the attributes of Jesus Christ. The scarlet had to be in there because He was both divine and human all in the same person. So the priest was carrying this around on his chest.

I do not know how much of this the Israelites understood, but God put a great deal of thought into this so that every time, for generation after generation, that people witnessed what the high priest was doing, they were seeing a forerunner of Jesus Christ. It is in symbolic attributes rather than in His actual life and character. It was quite a picture to carry this about him on the upper body where of course it was fully visible to anybody who looked at him face on.

After the ephod and the girdle, the high priest would put on the breastplate of judgment. That was its full name. The term "breastplate" probably gives many the impression of something that was hard-surfaced, but it was not at all. It was cloth just like the rest of the adornment there, but when seen from a little bit of a distance, it did give the impression as though it may have been hard. Perhaps the gold would also have helped make it look as though it was hard.

The basic material and the pattern of the material that was on the breastplate apparently was the same as that of the ephod. So the breastplate, as a finished product, was, as the Bible says, "one stand by one stand," and one stand was very close to 9 inches. So it was a 9 x 9 object that was on his chest.

However, that breastplate did not begin as 9 x 9. It actually began as 9 x 18. What they did though is they folded it in half so that the back part of the breastplate formed a pouch, a little pocket. It was worn across the priest's chest in a way that the back part was not visible, but it was there for a practical reason for being there. This 9 x 9 thing was right on his chest, and there was a gold **filigree** that went all around the border. It went across the bottom, up both sides, and across the front flap of the breastplate.

Turn now to Exodus 28:7.

**Exodus 28:7-10** It shall have two shoulder straps joined at its two edges, and so it shall be joined together. And the intricately woven band of the ephod, which is on it, shall be of the same workmanship, made of gold, blue, purple, and scarlet thread, and fine woven linen. "Then you shall take two onyx stones and engrave on them the names of the sons of Israel: six of their names on one stone and six names on the other stone, in order of their birth.

It was like this: The filigree went across the top, and then there was a gold ring right on the top corner, and then down 9 inches to a gold ring that was on the bottom corner; then a strap went from the rings on the bottom gold, and went down and attached to the ephod. I could find nothing that said why it did not attach to the girdle. I think there is a practical reason why, but the Scripture does not say.

We go back up to the top. It had the rings, and then there was a strap that went from the rings up to the shoulder. And then at the shoulder there was a setting we would call it. I think the *KJV* uses a strange word for setting. I cannot pick it up right now. But what that word means is a setting, and in that setting, one on each shoulder, was an onyx stone, and on each onyx stone were six names of the tribes of Israel.

Then to keep everything firm against the body, the strap continued on from the settings that were up there, and went down the back, and they attached, not to the ephod, but to the girdle. I think the reason for that was the man could then put on the girdle, and have the strap come up over the top. If it were already attached to the girdle in the front, it would have been hard and much more difficult to get into, so it left it free for it to be attached on the front. That way everything was kept in good order.

Let us go to Exodus 28, verses 9 through 14.

**Exodus 28:9-12** "Then you shall take two onyx stones and engrave on them the names of the sons of Israel: six of their names on one stone and six names on the other stone, in order of their birth. With the work of an engraver in stone, like the engravings of a signet, you shall engrave the two stones with the names of the sons of Israel. You shall set them in settings of gold. And you shall put the two stones on the shoulders of the ephod as memorial stones for the sons of Israel. So Aaron shall bear their names before the LORD on his two shoulders as a memorial.

Right there is a statement that has symbolic attributes to it. The high priest had to understand that he had to answer to God for some things regarding all twelve tribes. He had to bear them on his shoulder. Symbolically, it was only in two onyx stones with their names there, but in reality he was responsible to God for all twelve of those tribes. I do not know if there were any specific things he was ever told he was responsible for, but there was a responsibility to all twelve tribes that was borne by the high priest.

Keep on thinking that this man is representing Jesus Christ; therefore Jesus Christ is responsible to God for the well-being of all twelve tribes. It is less a physical responsibility. It is more a spiritual responsibility, and a little bit later I am going to tie you and me right into what He is responsible to us for. It is a wonderful thing that He is preparing for the people, that this man is an important man. The high priest was really the number two man in Israel. The only one over him was the king.

**Exodus 28:15-21** "You shall make the breastplate of judgment. Artistically woven according to the workmanship of the ephod you shall make it: of gold, blue, purple, and scarlet thread, and fine woven linen, you shall make it. It shall be doubled into a square: a span shall be its length, and a span shall be its width. And you shall put settings of stones in it, four rows of stones: *The* first row shall be a sardius, a topaz, and an emerald; this shall be the first row; the second row shall be a turquoise, a sapphire, and a diamond; the third row, a jacinth, an agate, and an amethyst; and the fourth row, a beryl, an onyx, and a jasper. They shall be set in gold settings. And the stones shall have the

names of the sons of Israel, twelve according to their names, like the engravings of a signet, each one with its own name; they shall be according to the twelve tribes.

There is a difference here. The onyx stones that were on the shoulder were according to their birth. When we get to the breastplate, He differentiates. These are according to their tribes. There is a difference.

The top row on the breastplate held the names of Zebulun, Issachar, and Judah. The second row consisted of Gad, Simeon, and Reuben. The third row consisted of Benjamin, Ephraim, and Manasseh. The bottom row included Naphtali, Asher, and Dan. Notice I said that they were placed *in* the breastplate, not *on*.

I am going to stop right there because I want to go off in a little bit different direction. Just keep those stones in your mind, and I will get back to them. We are going to go to Exodus 28:30.

**Exodus 28:30** And you shall put in the breastplate of judgment the Urim and the Thummim, and they shall be over Aaron's heart when he goes in before the LORD. So Aaron shall bear the judgment of the children of Israel over his heart before the LORD continually.

God is making an interesting little notation there. He could have said to just put it on Aaron's chest, but He said it had to be over his heart.

Nobody knows with absolute certainty what the Urim and Thummim were. The terms mean "lights" and "perfection." Most commentators think they were two precious stones small enough to be placed in the pouch of the breastplate—perhaps about the same size of the precious stones that were attached to the breastplate, but the Urim and Thummim were loose. They were not attached, and they were placed in the pouch of the breastplate when it was folded over.

One of the interesting things about these mysterious stones is that they were not exclusively associated with the high priest. Several times in the Bible they are associated simply with the priests. In several cases the Urim and Thummim were associated with the casting of lots, like casting or throwing dice.

This is interesting too, and I cannot figure this out, but this is what God's word says. There were a few times when the person simply asked for the ephod, when the context clearly tells you that what he really wanted was the Urim and Thummim. They just simply asked for the ephod. Through time it was like they grew a little bit careless about what they called it, or whatever, but instead of calling it the Urim and Thummim, they just called it the ephod. Believe it or not, on at least one occasion, the Urim and Thummim were called "the Ark of the Covenant." I have no idea why, but there is no doubt that they were very important to judgments being made in Israel.

There is not even one biblical record of a private individual appealing to the high priest for Urim and Thummim. It was almost entirely the king who did. This does not mean there were not times that this was not done, but it is not recorded in the Scriptures where somebody like David, or Asa, or somebody of that nature asked for Urim and Thummim. Usually the questioner was the king. On each occasion, when used, the Scripture shows that the question asked required a single-word

answer: "yes" or "no." Or it might be "go up" or "do not go up," which would be a little bit more explanatory than "yes" or "no." Depending on the way the king asked the question, the high priest would respond "yes" or "no"; "go up" or "do not go up"—things of that nature.

Let us go back to verse 30.

**Exodus 28:30** And you shall put in the **breastplate of judgment** the Urim and the Thummim.

Verse 30 says "the breastplate of judgment." An alternate name, which the commentators say is a correct way of translating it as well, was "the ornament of decision." It was ornamental, and it was used in the making of decisions.

It almost seems at times that the main purpose of the breastplate was to hold the Urim and Thummim. They were that important to the life of Israel. This means that the breastplate was a decision-making instrument that the high priest bore for the well-being of the entire nation. This begins to delineate something, because it appears that the overall purpose of the breastplate was to serve as a reminder to Israelites of the values that God placed on each individual. Now how did it do this? It did it through the names that were written on the stones. Names that were written on the stones represented the entire population. Each tribe's name was written down, and it represented everybody in that tribe.

The entire Israelitish population was represented on the high priest's heart, showing that God intended it be an instrument of judgment, which takes emotions, healings, affections, and things of that nature into account as he is making decisions in behalf of the entire nation.

The Urim and Thummim also served to teach them of the special revelation opened to the high priest that nobody else in the nation had, not even the king. That distinction was given in regard to things of spiritual value to somebody who was expected to have the spirituality to be able to discern the right course of action. I think that should imply to those of us that Jesus Christ's actions and decisions are being handled in a much better way, but along the same general line.

One final thing regarding the linkage of the ephod, the girdle, the shoulder stones, and the breastplate is that they were all tied together. When everything was in place, the ephod, the girdle, and the breastplate were one unit. Not only that, they were all of the same colors. Remember I said in the earlier sermon that everything in regarding to the Tabernacle was harmonious.

We are going to add one more thing to this harmony. It is interesting that the brazen altar, the incense altar (which Richard has been speaking about), and the breastplate (which I have been speaking about), are all described in the Bible as being four-square. That is something they all had in common. They were all four-square. That means that each one was of equal measurement in length and width, like 9 x 9. That is a four-square measurement. Well, the same thing is true of the incense altar. Its length and width were four-square. They were equal. Also the length and width of the brazen altar was four-square.

The researchers tell us that four-square indicates unity, balance, and equality. Remember, all of these things are instruments of judgment. So all three of these instruments deal in some way with judgment

on God's part. The brazen altar portrays God's judgment of accepting the sacrificial dedication of Christ, or either the national or individual lives of the Israelites, as well as Him accepting the Israelites' repentance of sin.

The golden incense altar portrays His accepting, healing, and making judgments regarding the individual saints. God hears the prayers, and He makes judgments on the basis of what the people are asking, and He is already telling us in advance that it is going to be done in this balanced unified way.

The breastplate portrays God dealing with decision-making regarding individual/national issues. You put them all together, and the entire picture reveals that there is no favoritism on God's part. His decision takes all aspects into consideration. Whether dealing with the Israelites, Gentiles, foreign or free, male or female, regardless of race or ethnicity, He judges all with absolute fairness. What we see here is a little guarantee that He will always do this. He never fails at taking everything into consideration. His judgment will always be the best. So the symbolism attached to each item of judgment is assurance to those who believe that there is always harmony, balance, and above all, mercy in all of His judgments.

We are not quite done with the breastplate, because there are things attached to it that continue to expand on the picture displayed to those who understand.

I mentioned before that the breastplate was bound on its edges by a gold filigree chain, and then there were also the rings and the straps going up over the shoulder, and they proceeded then to the stones up there. This we are going to build upon a little bit as we reach toward the conclusion of this sermon.

Each one of those onyx stones contained the names of each tribe according to birth order—six names on each shoulder. And then there was the breastplate. Again, it had names of the tribes on it, but each one was not in birth order any longer. It was in a different order altogether, and birth order was not even considered. It read according to their tribe.

When we went through it before, did you notice any difference in the names? What happened to Joseph? When removed from the shoulder to the breastplate, Joseph was missing. What happened to Levi? His name is not on the breastplate either. Those are the two most obvious changes, because we know that what happened with Joseph was that the birthright was given to him whenever Reuben disqualified himself. As a result of that, Joseph was awarded, as it were, a double portion of the inheritance.

So Joseph's personal name was removed from the breastplate and replaced with two tribes—Ephraim and Manasseh. But that brought the number up to 13, and that would not be balanced. Remember, I said it had to be four-square. Everything works out in a perfect balance for judgments to be made.

Levi was removed. So here was Levi, who in one sense, perhaps at least spiritually and educationally, was the most important tribe in Israel, and yet his name is not on the breastplate.

From here we are going to go to the book of Revelation, chapter 7, verse 4 where the 144,000 are listed. I want you to notice the order that the names are in.

**Revelation 7:4** And I heard the number of those who were sealed. One hundred and forty-four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel were sealed: Judah, Reuben, Gad, Asher, Naphtali, Manasseh, Simeon, Levi, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph, Benjamin.

If you go down that list, you will find that Levi is back in there. Manasseh is there. We see Joseph in there too. Things are jumbled up a little bit. What has happened here?

Exodus 28:10 shows that the shoulder stones were listed according to birth order, and Exodus 28:21 says that the breastplate stones were listed according to tribal order.

Incidentally, Dan is missing from the 144,000 in Revelation 7 and replaced with Levi. Nobody knows why. I have never seen a good explanation why Dan is not there, but God has His reasons, and He treats everybody fairly, so there is some reason why He did not include Dan's name there.

From here we are going to go to Numbers 10 to see a little bit more regarding the breastplate.

**Numbers 10:11-12** Now it came to pass on the twentieth day of the second month, in the second year, that the cloud was taken up from above the Tabernacle of the Testimony. And the children of Israel set out from the Wilderness of Sinai on their journeys; then the cloud settled down in the Wilderness of Paran.

**Numbers 10:14** The standard of the camp of the children of Judah set out first according to their armies.

Then right behind Judah came Issachar, and then behind him was Zebulun.

I want you to picture the breastplate. The first row at the top contained those three stones: one for Judah, one for Issachar, and one for Zebulun. They are arranged in the order that they marched in the wilderness. This begins to show us that when they were marching, they were arranged according to the order God had them perform some service for all of Israel. I am not going to tell you I know what the service was for every tribe. We can guess, speculate, and probably come reasonably close.

If we look back on that period of time, who were the fighters in Israel? It was Judah. They had the army hardly anybody could beat, and of course they became the royal tribe as well—the one from which David came, and then also the one from which Christ came.

After Zebulun something important took place. That is in verse 15.

**Numbers 10:15** Then the Tabernacle was taken down; and the sons of Gershon and the sons of Merari set out, carrying the Tabernacle.

When they began their march, Judah stood ready to go. The Levites took down the Tabernacle. The tribe of Gershon and Merari carried the Tabernacle, and they always marched immediately behind Zebulun.

Remember, in Hebrew, you read from the right to the left, so the leading tribe, Judah, was listed top right, and then to his left was Issachar, and then to his left was Zebulun, in terms of the stone. When they were marching in the wilderness, Judah led. Behind Judah was Issachar. Behind Issachar was Zebulun, and then behind Zebulun was the first group of Levites.

What I am leading to is this: The first group of Levites carried the Tabernacle. Then after that first group of Levites came Reuben, then Simeon, and then Gad. Immediately after Gad came the second group of Levites. They were carrying the Tabernacle furniture, which was carried by the Kohathites.

Immediately after that group of Levites came Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin, and after Benjamin came Dan, Asher, and Naphtali. That was their order going through the wilderness.

They all had their assignments. While they were camped or whether they were marching, they were in that specific order because they were doing things collectively, and yet individually, for the whole camp of Israel. Everything came off bang! bang! bang! There was no disorder. Everybody had their assignment. Everybody was responsible for carrying through with whatever their assignment was.

Now when they set up camp, guess what the first thing done was. They spread the Israelites in a great big circle all the way around the camp, and then the Levites put up the Tabernacle right smack dab in the middle. What does that portray? First of all it portrays that the center of their activities in all cases was what the Tabernacle represented. It was God's house, and therefore that was central to life, and the group that was responsible for it was the tribe of Levi.

The tribe of Levi was responsible to all twelve tribes for education in spiritual things. So that everything went well and everybody knew what their part was, they were instructing the whole time—"This is the way God wants it to be done." You see, a New Testament principle actually begins to arrive from that. In I Corinthians 12 Paul said, "God put everything in the body as it pleased Him."

Every individual is intended by God to serve the whole. It does not matter whether you are an Israelite, whether you are a Jew, whether you are a Manassite, whether you are an Ephraimite, you have been put into the body in order to serve the whole, and the central figure of everything is represented by that Tabernacle in the middle that contains the House of God, and His servant the High Priest, who is Jesus Christ.

This relates right back to the breastplate. It also relates to, when we begin to think about it more thoroughly, the 144,000. It stretches out further than just that portion of the Scripture beyond. It goes out further than I Corinthians 12, and there is a reason for that, and I will try to go through it fairly quickly, and maybe in the next sermon I can go through it in a little bit more detail, but I will at least give you the essentials of it.

Does anybody know what John 14:1-3 says? Jesus said it. He said, "In My Father's house are many mansions." There are many offices. What is He beginning to talk about here? He is beginning to encourage these people, to let them know there is a place for them in His Father's kingdom. "Don't you worry about that. There is a place for you to work in His kingdom, to be in His kingdom, to participate in His kingdom." It is giving them an object toward which to labor spiritually.

Revelation 14:3-4 tells us that the 144,000 are going to be the ones who are going to be Jesus Christ's right-hand men, if you want to call it that, in the Kingdom of God.

Now I am going to take it another step further. Maybe we will get into this the next time. Genesis 12:1-3 begins the promise that God made to Abraham. It is the promise regarding the Israelitish people that they were going to be the progeny of Abraham. God was beginning to unfold what His purpose is for these people.

I want you to notice, when you begin studying later, the last phrase in that promise God makes. It says, "In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." We rightly apply this blessing as being a prophecy that applies to spiritual salvation through Jesus. Now because Jesus was born as a human

being directly descended from Abraham, He begins to fit into this in a very big way. In Genesis 17:3-7, the promise is clearly expanded to eternal everlasting proportion, where it says in verse 7 that this is "an everlasting covenant."

**Genesis 17:3-7** Then Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him, saying: "As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations. No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an **everlasting covenant**, to be God to you and your descendants after you.

Now we all who have come out of the Worldwide Church of God have rather subconsciously tended to limit this fantastic promise to the Israelitish physical descendents of Abraham because of the influence of the teaching of booklets like *The United States and British Commonwealth in Prophecy*. It is not that *US and BC* were wrong in any way; however, that is too limiting. Because we think of it in those terms, it is too limiting for what God intends here.

I give Exodus 12 to remind you. Think of the context: Exodus 12, the very first keeping of Passover. God reminded them in there that the way was open for the Gentiles. All they had to do was commit themselves to the Old Covenant. I say "all." That is pretty difficult, but right from the very beginning God was showing that He had absolutely nothing against the Gentile people. Nothing at all, and that they were included. If they desired to become part of Israel, then they had to meet the requirement.

Then you need to jump to Galatians 3, verses 7-9, verses 12 through 14, and then verses 26 through 29.

**Galatians 3:7-9** Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, "In you all the nations shall be blessed." So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham.

**Galatians 3:12-14** Yet the law is not of faith, but "the man who does them shall live by them." Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree"), that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

**Galatians 3:26-29** For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you *are* Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

These verses, found within an epistle written to a Gentile congregation, can be considered as a summary statement, that from the very beginning, from Adam and Eve, Gentiles have always been included within God's purpose. You will notice that the larger context there is regarding the Abrahamic covenant. Genesis 12 and Galatians 3 are inextricably bound together. The Gentiles are directly told "You are all sons of God through faith." It also tells them that they are Abraham's seed

as well. Just like Abraham's own physical descendants, the Gentiles also become *Abraham's* seed—*his* descendants.

Ephesians 2, beginning in verse 11 and going all the way to verse 22, is fantastic. In this context Paul is explaining to another Gentile congregation, that by faith they have become citizens of Israel, but, (and there is a big "but" here), they have not become *fleshly* Israel, but have become citizens to an entirely new national unit called, "the household of God" (in verse 19) and, "a holy temple" (in verse 21.)

**Ephesians 2:11-22** Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands—that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you, who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father. Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of **the household of God**, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into **a holy temple** in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

Then in Galatians 6:15-16, Paul gives the name of that new unit. It is "the Israel of God."

**Galatians 6:15-16** For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation. And, as many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon **the Israel of God**.

These verses show that there are two Israels. There is physical Israel, and there is spiritual Israel. In the spiritual Israel there is no difference between Israelite and Gentile. They are all of the same spiritual family, and that family is the family of Abraham.

What Genesis 12 is referring to, it is prophesying of that family, and they can truly be called "Israel," but it is distinctly "the Israel of God."

Revelation 7—the 144,000—those tribes are mentioned there. That is where God is putting that first resurrection—right into the tribes—12 thousand to each tribe. Some of them are real Israelites; some of them are not, but He apportions 12 thousand of each tribe to spiritual Israel.

Just fantastic. That is the Israel Jesus Christ is carrying on His heart and His shoulders.