

The Breastplate – the Central and Ultimate Point of the Priesthood

In this message, we hope to see three things. First, we hope to see why it is that we consider **the breastplate the central and ultimate point of the priesthood**. We need a great deal of study to understand this. Second, we hope to see a clear picture from the type of Exodus 28 of how **the Lord used this breastplate to speak to and lead His people**. If we see this, we will also see that the breastplate is not only a type of the Lord's leading; it is also a type of the church itself. This is very mysterious. The high priest was wearing the built-up church. The garments worn by the priest were actually the building. He wore God's building. The breastplate shows us God's building. Third, we hope to see how we can apply **the breastplate in our spiritual life**, both in our Christian life and in our church life.

When Exodus 28 mentions the priestly garments, the first item that is mentioned is not the robe but the breastplate, indicating that the breastplate is the central item. "And these are the garments which they will make: a breastplate and an ephod..." (Exo. 28:4). The second item mentioned in this verse is the ephod. The breastplate was attached to the ephod. "And they shall bind the breastplate by its rings to the rings of the ephod..." (Exo. 28:28). The ephod also had two shoulder pieces attached to it. Therefore, in a very real sense the breastplate, the ephod, and the shoulder pieces formed one garment. What is the significance of this? The ephod, made of fine linen and strands of blue and purple and scarlet, signifies God Himself. **The ephod signifies the individual Christ**. The shoulder pieces with **the breastplate signify the built-up church** that is joined to Christ. Thus, this garment signifies Christ, the Head, with His Body, the church. In addition, the description of the precious stones in the breastplate is similar to the description of the precious stones that form the foundations of the New Jerusalem. These precious stones in the breastplate typify the consummate, ultimate stage of God's building. This is why we consider the breastplate to be such a central and ultimate item.

When Moses was alive, God spoke to him face to face in the tent of meeting. The priestly garments already existed, and Aaron had the breastplate of judgment, but at that time God did not speak to His people through the breastplate. He spoke to them directly through Moses, who is a type of Christ as the son of God. Hebrews 1:2 tells us that God speaks to us in the Son. Moses typifies Christ as the son, and Aaron typifies Christ as the High Priest. Aaron died before Moses; therefore, since Moses was with him, it is very likely that Aaron never used the Urim and the Thummim to receive God's speaking and leading. Later, however, when Joshua succeeded Moses and when Aaron's son Eleazar succeeded Aaron as the high priest, **the leading came through the breastplate**. When Joshua needed the Lord's leading, he had to go to Eleazar, and Eleazar had to inquire through the Urim and Thummim. From that point on, God's leading and His direct speaking to His people came through the breastplate. It is exceedingly important to see that the breastplate of **judgment** is for God's leading.

Each of the twelve stones of the breastplate had the names of one of the twelve tribes of Israel engraved upon it. If you were to write out all the names of the twelve tribes, you would need only eighteen of the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet. In other words, the precious stones with the names of the tribes of Israel contained all but four of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. The final four letters were added by the Thummim. The Thummim is the completion. Thus, all the letters of the Hebrew alphabet were on the breastplate, like the keys on a typewriter. Because all the letters were there, it was possible to compose words, sentences, and messages. The breastplate could be used to send a divine and mystical "text message." In this way, God would use the letters on the breastplate to convey a message through the high priest to His people. The Urim and Thummim represents not the Christ in you as an individual but the Christ in **the built-up church**. This means that if you want God's message for you, you should not look for it in your individual life. If you want God's speaking and leading, you need to get into the church life and be built up with other saints. You need to be vitally connected to saints in a vital group and built up with the saints in your locality. Then the Lord will have a way to convey all His leading to you and to all the other saints.

The engraving of the names of the twelve tribes on the precious stones corresponds to the inscribing of Christ into the believers' hearts, making them living letters of Christ, with Christ as the content. If we are not transformed and transparent and if we have not been inscribed with the Spirit of the living God along with Christ as the content but are merely opaque stones without any letters inscribed into us, it will be impossible for God to speak through us. Let us consider again the illustration of the breastplate. Suppose some stones had no letters inscribed, and it was time for God to speak through the high priest. If letters were missing from the stones on the breastplate, there would be **no way for God's message to be conveyed** completely...

Let me illustrate the significance of having Christ inscribed upon us as the letters of God's alphabet...We can liken the stones upon the breastplate inscribed with letters to **a keyboard**. What if half of the letters on the keyboard were missing? Then when you are typing your notes, what you have transcribed would be mere gibberish; it would be utterly incoherent. With missing letters the words of the message would be hard to decipher. Nothing would be clear because many letters would be missing. We can also apply this to how well we are able to understand a message or the Lord's leading to the church. You might listen to a message and think, *"I don't understand anything,"* whereas another brother seems to understand everything. How is it that this other brother understands everything, yet you understand nothing? It is because the other brother has **a full alphabet** of Christ inscribed upon his heart, but you may have only half of the letters inscribed upon yours. Similarly, the Lord may be giving **a clear leading** to the church; some may have a very clear sense of how the Lord is leading the church, yet others may not understand it because they do not have enough of Christ inscribed upon them. The Lord desires to **lead us**, to **speak to us**, and to **give us messages**, yet we may not have adequate letters to understand. This is why we need Christ as the Thummim, as the "completer." We need Christ added to us to complete us in areas in which we have not been adequately inscribed. In this way, not only is Christ being ministered to us, but also there is a full letter of Christ that can be known and read by all men.

Through our living and our speaking others should be able to read Christ in us. They should be able to hear Christ. We should be a letter of Christ "known and read by all men". Therefore, we need much more inscribing by the ministry of the new covenant and much more experience of Christ. These two always go together. We cannot be satisfied by merely understanding the significance of this type of the breast plate. Certainly, we have the top interpretation of this type, and it is quite profound and interesting. However, **we cannot stop there**. If we merely have an understanding of this type, we fall short of God's purpose in revealing it to us. We must pursue not only the **knowledge of the truth** but also **the experience of Christ**. Therefore, let us seek the Lord and ask Him, *"How many letters do I have in my spiritual alphabet?"* This will make us more desperate for the experience of Christ.

The Thummim typifies Christ as the perfecter and completer; thus, He is the spiritual alphabet for both inscribing and completing. Christ is the **Author** and **Perfecter** of our faith. No matter how much of Christ has been inscribed into us, we still have something missing; we are still short of Christ. We still need Christ as Thummim. This matches our experience. You may have been in the church life for fifty years and have had many experience of Christ being inscribed into you. **Yet** at the most, you are still just one stone with three consonants inscribed upon you. You still need to be **added together** with the other stones. Even when we add all the other stones together, there is still something missing. We are still incomplete. We can also **apply** this to our experience with our vital groups. We may really enjoy the Lord together and be built up together. But when we face some problems, we do not know what to do; **we still need Christ**. We need the Urim and the Thummim. We need Christ to come and complete us. We need to pray and contact Him for His shining and His perfecting. It is the same for the elders in a local church. They may have much of Christ inscribed upon them. They may be built up together. However, if you would ask them how to know or how to read the situation in your local church and what to do when particular problems arise, they would tell you, *"We don't know. We need to pray and contact the Lord. We need Christ. We need light. We need completion. Our view is only partial; our understanding is incomplete."* We need the Urim and Thummim to be added, even to the built-up church. (Excerpt from *The Ministry of the Word*, vol. 20, no. 7, July 2016. *Ministry Magazine*, pp. 229-260)