

Exodus Sermon Series

# Meeting with God

## Exodus 28:31-43

When you meet with someone important, you dress up. You dress for the job you want. You dress for the occasion. God is clothing the high priest so that he can meet with Him and intercede for Israel. Aaron will not just look a certain way; he is decked with wisdom and fruitfulness, and holiness crowns his head as he bears the iniquity of Israel.

### Overview of the Text

The robe of the ephod is blue, probably about eight feet long, with an opening for his head reinforced like a coat of mail to bear the weight of the ephod and breastplate (vv31-32). The hem of the robe has blue, purple, and scarlet pomegranates alternating with golden bells all the way around (vv33-34). The sound of bells both in and outside the holy place protects the high priest from death (v35). A plate of pure gold engraved with “Holiness to the Lord” is attached to the front of Aaron’s turban, covering his forehead, so that he may bear or take away the iniquity of Israel’s holy gifts, that they may be accepted (vv36-38). The tunic, which goes under the robe and ephod, as well as the turban and sash are made of skillfully woven linen (v39). Aaron’s sons, priests but not high priests, also have tunics, sashes, and turbans to serve Yahweh (vv40-41). Nakedness indicates sin and shame, so they are covered with linen trousers that guilt and death do not come upon them in God’s holy presence (vv42-43).

### The Sound of Bells

Modern Christians have described the faith once for all delivered to the saints as a relationship, not a religion. All religions involve relationships, but not all relationships are part of religions. We need to get away from lifeless, formulaic religion without ditching everything the triune God has given us. When you have a relationship with Jesus Christ, you learn about Him through the Bible that the Holy Spirit inspired and preserved over two millennia, beautifully translated into English by William Tyndale in the early 1500s. If you have trust in Jesus then you are connected to the worldwide church that has seen God’s kingdom come in power and His blessings flow as far as the curse is found since Pentecost. If your definition of spirituality excludes the bells on the bottom of Aaron’s robe, then it’s too small. Not all liturgy is biblical and healthy, but God still bestows glory and beauty on the worship of His covenant people today (cf. 28:2). God hears the sound of the bells when Aaron ministers, and so does everyone else. The stakes are high: “that he may not die” (v35). You don’t go into court of the king unannounced. How much more should we approach God with reverence? This may seem odd because we don’t think about worship very much. Of course God knows where Aaron is. He also knows what you need before you pray, but you still must pray (Matt. 6:8). The one who comes to God must regard Him as holy, which is why we must worship with reverence and godly fear (Heb. 12:28; 11:6). *Lex orandi, lex credendi*: the law of prayer is the law of faith. The way you pray drives the way you think about God. You can’t say, “My mom knows I respect her. I don’t have to obey cheerfully and say ‘Yes, ma’am’”. She knows you respect her *because*

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of what you say and do. Honor unexpressed isn't. Similar to the way the ephod onyx stones and breastplate are memorials to God that also remind and teach Israel, so the bells tell God's people that the high priest is ministering. Seeing one another worship and intercede for the world is heartening. Today church bells announce that God's people are gathering to Him because Jesus has risen.

### **Decked with Pomegranates**

Named after *pomum* "apple" and *granatum* "seeded", pomegranates are round, red fruit with large seeds. They are festive and beautiful, associated with the abundance and beauty of the promise land: "a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey" (Deut. 8:8; cf. Num. 13:23, 20:5). Pomegranates are associated with love in the Song of Songs (8:2, 7:12, 4:3), and they wither away when God's people are disobedient: "Be ashamed, you farmers, wail, you vinedressers, for the wheat and the barley; because the harvest of the field has perished. The vine has dried up, And the fig tree has withered; the pomegranate tree, the palm tree also, and the apple tree—all the trees of the field are withered; surely joy has withered away from the sons of men" (Joel 1:11-12). This is blessing you can see and taste, adorning the high priest who worships and ministers to God. The fruit of the Spirit and joy of music hangs on him as it does on all of God's priestly people. Each pillar of the temple will have 400 pomegranates, and choirs will sing on Mount Zion (1 Kgs. 7:20, 42). The Spirit causes us to bear more fruit.

### **Holiness to the Lord**

Part of the curse that fell on Adam was that he would eat by the sweat of his brow (Gen. 3:19). Aaron works in the tabernacle, but on his forehead is a plate or "flower" of pure gold with "Holiness to the Lord" engraved on it (vv36-37). Aaron ministers to God on behalf of Israel, and so this covering allows him to "bear the iniquity of the holy things which the children of Israel hallow in all their holy gifts" (v38). Israelites offer gifts, symbolically borne by the high priest to Yahweh, and even these must be made holy for Him. When King Uzziah, who is not a priest, burns incense, leprosy breaks out on his forehead (2 Chron. 26:16-20). In Revelation, those who follow the beast, have a mark on their foreheads, and only they can buy and sell (Rev. 13:16). The beast is a civil ruler that persecutes the church. But God's people are marked by His holiness and will not be branded by idolatrous authorities. His image in inalienable. We have a high priest who is perfect, and even in his crucifixion, John points out that his seamless tunic was not torn (Jn. 19:23). Jesus honored His Father, announced His kingdom, served abundantly by the Holy Spirit, and brought to us God by offering Himself as a holy sacrifice. He became for us wisdom, righteousness, holiness, and redemption.