

The Twelve Stones of the High Priest's Breastplate: Meaning, Symbolism, and the Gospel Message

By Pastor Ed Anderson

The **breastplate of judgment**, described in **Exodus 28:15-21**, is one of the most fascinating and significant artifacts of the Old Testament priesthood. It was not just an ornate piece of jewelry but a deeply symbolic and spiritual representation of **God's covenant, His intercession for His people, and the coming work of Jesus Christ as our High Priest.**

This article will explore:

- The **Biblical description** of the breastplate
- The **twelve gemstones and their meanings**
- The **connection to the twelve tribes of Israel**
- The **New Testament fulfillment and the New Jerusalem**
- The **Urim and Thummim: God's divine guidance system**
- The **gospel message of God's character, His love, and the work of Jesus and the**

Holy Spirit

By understanding the deeper significance of these stones, we gain insight into **God's redemptive plan** and His **eternal intercession for His people.**

1. The High Priest's Breastplate: Biblical Context

The **breastplate of judgment** was a **sacred garment** worn by the **high priest of Israel**. It was crafted from **gold, blue, purple, and scarlet fabric**, measuring a **span in width and length (approximately 9 inches square)**. The breastplate was set with **twelve gemstones**, each engraved with the **name of a tribe of Israel.**

Exodus 28:15-21 (KJV)

“And thou shalt make the breastplate of judgment with cunning work... And thou shalt set in it settings of stones, even four rows of stones... And the stones shall be with the names of the children of Israel, twelve, according to their names, like the engravings of a signet; every one with his name shall they be according to the twelve tribes.”

The **breastplate was worn over the high priest's heart**, symbolizing that he bore the people of Israel before God. This foreshadowed **Jesus Christ, our High Priest**, who now intercedes for us before the Father (**Hebrews 7:25**).

2. The Twelve Stones and Their Meaning

Each of the twelve stones represented a **tribe of Israel** and carried a deep **spiritual and prophetic meaning**.

First Row

Stone (Traditional Name)	Modern Identification	Symbolism	Tribe
Sardius (Ruby or Carnelian)	Red Carnelian	Blood, sacrifice, redemption	Reuben ("Behold, a son")
Topaz	Yellow Topaz or Peridot	Purity, refinement through fire	Simeon ("Hearing")
Carbuncle (Garnet)	Garnet	Passion, atonement, warrior spirit	Levi (Priesthood, "Joined")

Second Row

Stone (Traditional Name)	Modern Identification	Symbolism	Tribe
Emerald	Green Emerald	Growth, prosperity, eternal life	Judah ("Praise")
Sapphire	Blue Sapphire	Divine revelation, heavenly truth	Issachar ("Reward")
Diamond	White Diamond or Rock Crystal	Strength, invincibility, covenant	Zebulun ("Dwelling")

Third Row

Stone (Traditional Name)	Modern Identification	Symbolism	Tribe
Ligure (Jacinth or Amber)	Amber or Jacinth	Glory, wisdom, divine presence	Dan ("He judges")
Agate	Banded Agate	Stability, protection, connection to earth	Naphtali ("Wrestling")
Amethyst	Purple Amethyst	Royalty, spiritual insight, self-control	Gad ("Troop")

Fourth Row

Stone (Traditional Name)	Modern Identification	Symbolism	Tribe
Beryl	Aquamarine or Green Beryl	Clarity, divine favor, purity	Asher ("Happy")
Onyx	Black Onyx or Sardonyx	Strength, endurance, overcoming trials	Joseph ("He adds")
Jasper	Multi-colored Jasper	Diversity, endurance, unity	Benjamin ("Son of the right hand")

These stones remind us that **God sees each of His people individually**, but He unites them as **one body**, just as the **Church is united in Christ**.

3. The Urim and Thummim: God's Divine Guidance

Within the breastplate was placed the **Urim and Thummim**, mysterious objects used by the high priest to **determine God's will**.

Exodus 28:30 (KJV)

“And thou shalt put in the breastplate of judgment the Urim and the Thummim; and they shall be upon Aaron's heart, when he goeth in before the Lord: and Aaron shall bear the judgment of the children of Israel upon his heart before the Lord continually.”

These items were used for **divine guidance**, often answering “yes” or “no” questions about Israel's future (**Numbers 27:21**).

Connection to Jesus and the Holy Spirit

- **Jesus is the ultimate revelation of God's will** (**Hebrews 1:1-2**).
- **The Holy Spirit now guides believers** just as the **Urim and Thummim guided Israel** (**John 16:13**).

4. The Stones in the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:19-20)

These stones reappear in **Revelation 21:19-20**, forming the **foundations of the New Jerusalem**. This signifies the **completion of God's redemptive plan**.

The Twelve Foundations

- These **precious stones symbolize the apostles**, just as the breastplate symbolized the **tribes of Israel**.
- This reveals that both **Israel and the Church are united in Christ** (**Ephesians 2:19-22**).

5. The Gospel Message and the Work of Christ

Jesus: The True High Priest

- The **high priest** bore the names of Israel; **Jesus bears our names in heaven** (**Hebrews 4:14-16**).

- He intercedes for us continually (Romans 8:34).

The Love of God Reflected in the Breastplate

- Each stone was individually set in gold, just as each believer is precious to God (Malachi 3:17).
- The breastplate was worn **over the priest's heart**, symbolizing **God's love and care** for His people.

The Holy Spirit as Our Guide

- Just as the **Urim and Thummim** provided **guidance**, the **Holy Spirit** leads us today (John 14:26, Galatians 5:16).
- The **Spirit seals us** for salvation, just as the **stones were engraved with the names of the tribes** (Ephesians 1:13-14).

Conclusion: God's Eternal Covenant and the Stones of the Breastplate

The twelve stones of the high priest's breastplate are **far more than historical artifacts**—they are a **powerful representation of God's eternal plan**.

Key Takeaways

1. **God's people are always before Him**—just as the stones were worn over the priest's heart.
2. **Jesus is our eternal High Priest**, interceding for us before the Father.
3. **The Urim and Thummim prefigure the guidance of the Holy Spirit.**
4. **The New Jerusalem will be built upon the foundation of both Israel and the Church.**
5. **God's love and faithfulness endure forever**—our names are written on His hands (Isaiah 49:16).

Through these stones, we see **God's covenant, His love, and His eternal plan** unfolding from **Genesis to Revelation**, all fulfilled in **Jesus Christ!**