

AN EXEGESIS OF EXODUS 28:2-3

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Introduction

In his brief work, *Art and the Bible*, Francis Schaeffer comments on the decoration of the temple in 2 Chronicles 3:6 saying, “God simply wanted beauty in the temple. . . . Come with me to the Alps and look at the snow-covered mountains. There can be no question. God is interested in beauty. God made people to be beautiful. And beauty has a place in the worship of God.”¹ In much the same fashion as Schaeffer’s observation of 2 Chron 3:6 and the temple, the author of Exodus seems to be communicating a similar message in Exodus 28:2-3 when he records God’s command for Moses to make garments for his brother Aaron “for glory and beauty.” With respect to Ex 28:2-3, whereas the passage in 2 Chron 3:6 occurs in the development of Solomon’s temple, the former text appears in the narrative setting where God sets forth his plans for the construction of the tabernacle.

In both cases, whether the tabernacle or the temple, the extravagance and splendor of their construction, even down to the very vestments worn by the priesthood, however, seem to point to more than just God’s endorsement of beauty for beauty’s sake. Although Schaeffer’s comments are not inaccurate, they are definitely not exhaustive as to explaining the reasoning behind God’s emphatic insistence for the place of his dwelling and the apparel of his priests to be artistic and exquisite. With regard

¹Francis A. Schaeffer, *Art and the Bible*, rev. ed. (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2006), 26.

specifically to Aaron's garments, upon further examination of Ex 28:2-3, one may come to realize a much greater theological intention for tailoring these vestments "for glory and beauty" as a necessary prerequisite for establishing a priesthood capable of serving God and his people.

Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to analyze and exegete Exodus 28:2-3 in order to determine God's intention in having the vestments artistically crafted for Aaron to serve as a priest unto God. This paper will accomplish this goal by seeking to understand the textual meaning of Ex 28:2-3 in light of its historical and literary context as well as submitting the passage to theological observation so that substantiated application may be drawn from its intention for modern day Christians.

Historical Context

The book of Exodus, as the second unit of the Pentateuch, has suffered under the extreme scrutiny of historians and archaeologists, particularly since the late nineteenth century. The lack of extra-biblical evidence in support of Exodus' many characters and places has caused some scholars to doubt the reliability of its witness. Although there is much that can be verified in favor of the truthfulness of Exodus' accounts, historical discovery has remained silent on many of the book's major subjects.²

Despite the lack of external sources that speak of the events of Exodus, one must not hastily assume that what is recounted is therefore not historical. John I. Durham

²Remarking on events, people, and places that *can* be proved in light of historical and archaeological findings, Durham asserts that the extra-biblical witness is in agreement with the Scriptures on matters such as the existence of Egypt, Egyptian slavery of a people who resembled the Israelites, the presence of a people much like the Israelites in the wilderness of Kadesh-Barnea, and the confirmation of more than one set of dates for the Israelites wilderness experience and eventual conquest. John I. Durham, *Exodus*, Word Biblical Commentary, ed. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker, vol. 3 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), xxv.

posits the idea that readers of Exodus should view “the narrative of Exodus *in* history rather than *as* history”³ Durham’s viewpoint is correct in its slight nuance insofar as it presupposes that the author’s main goal in writing the book of Exodus was not simply for supplying a record of historical events. Rather, what is also infused into the composition of Israel’s history of deliverance and subsequent formation into a covenant community is the author’s purpose and intention.⁴ In addition, Durham adds that the combination of the authorial intent with the historical record forms a unity that has primarily a theological purpose.⁵ In other words, the author has put together every aspect of Exodus’ composition in order to convey a theological message.⁶ Therefore, when interpreting Ex 28:2-3, one must take into account its placement within the historical framework of the book’s setting if one desires to fully comprehend the text’s fuller meaning.

Ex 28:2-3 is set within the second major section of the book’s layout. Israel’s deliverance from slavery in Egypt and their journey to Mount Sinai (Ex 1-19) constitutes the first part. The second section involves God setting up a covenant with the Israelites while they rest by Sinai (Ex 20-40).⁷ Once the Israelites arrive at Mount Sinai, the

³Ibid.

⁴John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 25.

⁵Durham, xx.

⁶Durham argues that Exodus is “theological in concept, in arrangement, in content, and in implication. It is a book of faith, about faith, and directed primarily to those with faith. Those who read the Book of Exodus without faith, though they will inevitably profit from their reading, will not understand its message. . . . For its ancient compilers the whole of Exodus was theological. Their purpose in the composition of both intermediary forms and the final form of the book was a theological one. Thus all other considerations are shifted to the background, and the only unity that is of any real importance in the Book of Exodus is theological unity—and that the book displays on every hand.” Ibid., xx-xxi.

⁷Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, The New American Commentary, ed. E. Ray Clendenen, vol. 2

journey is suspended and the covenant becomes the central concern. After Israel accepts God's covenant, the Lord summons Moses to ascend the mountain where Moses will spend the next forty days receiving God's instructions for the construction of the tabernacle, the location of Israel's center of worship and God's earthly dwelling place.⁸ Thus, one may recognize that God's expectation of his people immediately following his covenant with them is worship. So, as one enters the narrative scene in Ex 28:2-3, he breaks into the unfolding of God's plans for the proper worship of himself for those who have entered into covenant with him.

Literary Context

Ex 28:2-3 occurs near the middle of a subunit (25:1-31:18) which is part of the second major section of Exodus (20-40). Israel has escaped the Egyptian attack, traversed through the wilderness, and has reached Mount Sinai. At this time, God has established his covenant with them, and they are encamped at the foot of Sinai while they await the return of Moses from his personal meeting with God from atop the mountain. God's design for Aaron's vestments appears in the historical narrative which records his instructions for the manner in which he intends the Israelites to worship him in the place where he plans to dwell on earth.

Although there are varying stances⁹ as to the interpretation behind the intricate details of the tabernacle and its inner sanctums, even with respect to the minute detail

(Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2006), 19.

⁸Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, New Studies in Biblical Theology, ed. D. A. Carson, vol. 15 (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 2003), 102-03.

⁹The theological interpretation of Aaron's clothing in conjunction with its setting within the tabernacle narrative will be covered in the exegesis and theological analysis parts of this paper.

invested in forming Aaron's priestly garb, it is clear that Ex 28:2-3 ought to be understood in view of God's intention to prepare his people for worship and to develop a place for him to dwell in their midst. After Israel's idolatrous sin in Ex 32:1-6 and God's renewal of the covenant in 34:10-28, the rest of the book of Exodus (35:1-40:38) demonstrates the Israelites' attempt to keep God's covenant and to follow his command to construct the tabernacle so that his presence and glory would dwell among them.¹⁰ In other words, Alviero Niccacci, in his article situated in the book *Narrative Syntax and the Hebrew Bible*, sees Ex 25:1-31:18 as characterized by "instruction" versus Ex 35-40 which would be understood as "execution."¹¹

The passage of Ex 28:2-3 exists within its own subunit (25:1-31:18) as part of the first of seven acts of the tabernacle narrative which parallel the seven acts of creation depicted in Genesis 1.¹² Therefore, the formation of the tabernacle is meant to represent God's creation of heaven and earth along with some of the more specific elements contained in Genesis 1 and 2 such as the creation of male and female and the Garden of Eden.¹³ Exodus 28:2-3 appears within the narrative concerning priestly instructions

¹⁰Dempster notes the communicative act of the text by observing, "God is with his people. Communion is a genuine reality. This text [Ex 40:34-38] greatly amplifies the covenant promise that God would be with his people." Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 107.

¹¹Alviero Niccacci, "Basic Facts and Theory of the Biblical Hebrew Verb System in Prose," in *Narrative Syntax and the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Ellen van Wolde (Boston: Brill Academic, 2002), 179. Niccacci sees a parallel account of the BH prose pattern of "instruction" and "execution" in 1 Samuel. He writes, "1 Sam 16:23 relates the execution of an instruction imparted in 16:14. It is noteworthy that both instruction and execution employ the same verb form *w^eqatal*, clearly with different function. In the instruction *w^eqatal* expresses indicative future while in the execution it expresses repetition or habit. The same is found in Ex 18:25-26 (execution) vs. 18:22 (instruction)."

¹²Dempster, 102.

¹³Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 298-99. Sailhamer identifies the textual markers for the seven acts of the tabernacle narrative as a similar form of demarcation found in the creation narrative found in Genesis 1. He notes that each act is introduced with the "divine speech, 'And God said' (Gen 1:3,

spanning from Ex 28-29. According to Durham, the Lord's word to Moses with reference to the organization of the priesthood comes immediately behind the formal instructions concerning the major facets of the tabernacle because of its message of "symbolism and function."¹⁴ In other words, the priesthood served as facilitators and ministers of communicating God's meaning which he implanted into the design of the tabernacle and the purpose of the performance of its equipment.¹⁵ So, as one interprets the significance of the meticulous detail which God delegates to Moses with respect to Aaron's vestments in Ex 28:2-3, he must make sense of its relationship to the purpose of the tabernacle as a whole.

Exegesis

In Ex 28:1, God summons Moses to bring Aaron and his sons out from the people in order to establish a priesthood. From Ex 25-27, God has given Moses the blueprint for building the tabernacle, inside and out. And now, the Lord proceeds to instruct Moses on the manner in which those who will minister and serve within the tabernacle must be adorned and function in order to operate as worthy priests in God's service.

The text begins in 28:2 with וַעֲשֵׂהְךָ (Then, you shall make). The verb appears in the preterite which alerts the reader to a shift in the scene from the command God gave

6, 9, 14, 20, 24, 26; cf. vv. 11, 28, 29). In the same way, the Torah's instruction for the building of the tabernacle is divided into seven acts, each introduced by the divine speech, 'And the LORD said' (Ex 25:1; 30:11, 17, 22, 34; 31:1, 12)." See the rest of his discussion on the parallels between the two accounts in Sailhamer, 299-300.

¹⁴Durham, 351.

¹⁵Ibid.

in 28:1. In addition, the prefixed waw-consecutive functions as a coordinating conjunction linking 28:2 with the previous verse thereby showing the relationship between God's imperative to Moses in 28:1 to his subsequent command in 28:2. When the waw-consecutive is prefixed to a perfect verb, which is in fact the form of עשה in this instance, the construction points towards a progression in the narrative.¹⁶ Therefore, God's initial call for Moses to gather together Aaron and his sons is now followed up by further instructions from God as to the purpose of Moses bringing his brother and nephews out from amongst the people.

With respect to the syntactical function of וַעֲשֵׂהְךָ, the translation into English reflects completed action which will be accomplished in the future. Although the English solicits the use of "shall" to indicate the future aspect of the verb, one should view God's command to Moses more so in terms of inevitability rather than possibility. In this case, God's command *will* be obeyed and executed; therefore, to understand וַעֲשֵׂהְךָ in a modal sense fails to capture the essence of God's imperative to Moses encapsulated in the perfect tense form of עשה. This view is further supported by the eventual fulfillment of the tailoring of the priestly garments in Exodus 39.

God commits Moses to being responsible for having Aaron's vestments made, but then assigns the priestly wardrobe a unique characteristic, namely, they are to be בגדי־קֹדֶשׁ (holy garments). The Hebrew root for "garments" is בָּנָה which HALOT defines

¹⁶Christo H. J. van der Merwe, Jackie A. Naude, and Jan H. Kroeze, *A Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar*, Biblical Languages: Hebrew, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Richard S. Hess, vol. 3 (New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2006), 169.

as “any kind of garment, clothing.”¹⁷ However, **בְּגָד** is inextricably linked to **קִדְשׁ** by a maqef which emphasizes the radically new nature of these ordinary garments. In the construct state, **קִדְשׁ** in the genitive case functions in a descriptive manner of its head noun, **בְּגָד**, which serves as the direct object of what God commands Moses to have made (**וַעֲשִׂיתָ**). Reminiscent of the scene in the Garden of Eden when God clothed Adam and Eve with “garments of skin” to cover their nakedness due to their sinfulness, so also the priesthood must symbolically wear these garments in the presence of God due to the Fall (cf. Gen 3:21; Ex 28:42).¹⁸ Therefore, Aaron and his sons are adorned with normal garments which will be made holy so that they are able both to represent humanity’s sinful nature and the holiness of God, since they are priests to the people on behalf of God.¹⁹

Next, God makes an interesting statement as he reveals the purpose of fashioning “holy garments” for Aaron. He says that they are **לְכְבוֹד וּלְתִפְאָרֶת**, that is, “for glory and beauty.” Here in this case, the prefixed **לְ** to the noun **כְּבוֹד**²⁰ introduces a dependent clause which explains the purpose for making “holy garments.” The simple-

¹⁷Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, rev ed. (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill Academic, 1994), 1054, CD-ROM.

¹⁸Although the word employed in the Genesis account for “garment” is not **בְּגָד** but instead is **כְּתָנִית** the concept remains the same.

¹⁹J. Gerald Janzen, *Exodus* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 205-06.

²⁰HALOT assigns the usage of **כְּבוֹד** in this instance to a “non-theological” rendering of the traditional Hebrew word associated with God’s “glory.” However, one must not put too much emphasis on its “non-theological” character insofar as the author is most definitely linking the “glory” of these garments to the splendor of the tabernacle which was also a representation of the “glory” of God, which when attributed to Yahweh, HALOT catalogues it under the “theological” category (HALOT, 4134).

waw prefixed to the second noun in the clause, תְּפִאֲרֹת,²¹ connects the words כְּבוֹד and תְּפִאֲרֹת together allowing them to serve complimentary roles in disclosing God’s aim for clothing Aaron with these special priestly vestments. These two words have a syntactical function of apposition insofar as they further explain the nature and purpose of the קִדְשׁ־בְּגָדִי (holy garments).

The only other occurrence of the clause וְלִתְפִאֲרֹת וְלִכְבוֹד in the OT appears later in the same chapter in 28:40. The reoccurrence of God’s initiative to have the priestly vestments constructed “for glory and beauty” in 28:40 functions as a textual marker linking Aaron’s garments to his sons’ apparel. In 28:2-39, the emphasis is on Aaron as the “head” or “chief” priest; however, despite his preeminence among his subordinates, God does not allow for any of those who will be serving in the Lord’s divinely-appointed priesthood from wearing sacred vestments that are crafted for a lesser purpose. Instead, the entire priesthood will array themselves in clothing that has been made “for glory and beauty.”²² As the reader will see later in 28:3, the unique quality of these garments is a necessary prerequisite for entering into God’s priesthood. At one level, connoted by the diction of the author of Exodus with reference to words that are elsewhere used to describe God’s “glory” and “beauty,” Meredith G. Kline concludes that “those who minister in the presence of the Glory of the Lord must reflect his holy

²¹The Hebrew word employed here as a parallel to כְּבוֹד is תְּפִאֲרֹת which is a term that HALOT defines as “beauty, ornament” when used to describe clothing, jewelry, and other such particles of adornment (Ibid., 0257).

²²Stuart, 617.

beauty.”²³

In Ex 28:3, the clause begins with **וְאַתָּה** which precedes the main verb **תִּדְבֹר**. The inclusion of the independent pronoun before the verb, which matches it in both gender and number, functions in an emphatic manner. In addition to its identification of Moses as the subject of the main verb, this construction also further illumines the weight of the responsibility which God lays upon Moses with regard to operating on his behalf with the people in building the tabernacle and preparing the priesthood.²⁴

The ones to whom Moses commissions to fashion Aaron’s garments are those who are called the **הַקְּמֵי-לֵב** (skilled of heart).²⁵ Here, those whom God endows for this special purpose are defined holistically by their ability to craft articles of clothing that will serve as sacred vestments for the priesthood. The addition of **לֵב** connected to **הַקְּמֵי** by the maqqef ought to be understood as representative of these men’s whole beings. In other words, God has gifted certain persons with this type of skill to the extent that their whole person is identified with their unique abilities.²⁶

²³Meredith G. Kline, “Investiture with the image of God,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 40, no. 1 (Fall 1977): 41.

²⁴Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, trans. Israel Abraham (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1987), 371. Cassuto observes that the placement of the pronoun **וְאַתָּה** at the beginning of the sentence in Ex 28:3 constitutes the third time that God has placed this emphasis on Moses’ leadership and mediatorial responsibility (cf. Ex 27:20; 28:1; 30:23; 31:13).

²⁵Other English translations such as the ESV, NASB, NIV, and NKJV gloss over **הַקְּמֵי-לֵב** and render the phrase in a manner that summarizes the full meaning of the construct in one word, that is, “skillful.” These translations fail to capture the indivisible link between **הַקְּמֵי** and **לֵב**. Only the KJV comes close to a word-for-word mirror of the Hebrew phrase, where they translate it as “wise hearted.” Although the KJV seems to match the original language more closely than the former English translations, it still falls short of grasping the nuanced interpretation of the adjective **הַקְּמֵי** as “skillful” rather than “wise” (HALOT, 2852).

²⁶William H. C. Propp, *Exodus 19-40*, The Anchor Bible Commentary, vol. 2A (New York: Random House, 2006), 431.

The next clause is introduced by the relative pronoun **אֲשֶׁר**. In this case, it is best translated as “whom” due to the fact that the antecedent of **אֲשֶׁר** is the direct object of the main verb in 28:3.²⁷ Therefore, the relative clause is explanatory or epexegetical insofar as the subordinate clause further clarifies the identity of the **חֲכָמֵי-לֵב**. With reference to the “skilled of heart,” God testifies that the excellence of these men’s abilities is nothing more than a result of his own enablement. He says of the men **חֲכָמָה רָיַח מִלְּאֲתָיו רָיַח** (I have filled with a spirit of skill).²⁸ As noted earlier, 28:2-3 appears in the first act of seven contained in 25:1-31:18 that parallel the seven acts of creation in Genesis 1-2. Therefore, it is fitting to see God’s giving the certain men the **חֲכָמָה רָיַח** (a spirit of skill) in comparison to the scene in the Garden of Eden where God breathes into Adam’s nostrils the breath of life (cf. Gen 2:7).²⁹ Once again, just as in its adjectival form (**חָכָם**), the noun **חֲכָמָה** is best translated “skill” rather than “wisdom.” An interesting point with regard to **חֲכָמָה** is that in the OT, the noun’s first appearance is in Ex 28:3, and is used with reference to “skill in technical matters”³⁰ rather than a form of sagacity.³¹

²⁷van der Merwe, *A Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar*, 260.

²⁸Concerning the interpretation of **מִלְּאֲתָיו** (I have filled), Propp posits, “This might refer either to the bestowal of aptitude at birth or to a recent spiritual gift. Probably both are intended: under renewed inspiration, the already talented artisans will surpass themselves. Cf. 31:6; 35:10, 25: 36:1, 2, 4, 8 (Propp, 431).” Although both of Propp’s inferences may be valid, the text does not seem to supply sufficient evidence either way. Still, whatever conclusion may be decided, the focus of the text rests clearly on God as the source of man’s ability to perform these difficult and detailed tasks.

²⁹The construct **חֲכָמָה רָיַח** is found only in two other locations in the OT. First, in Deuteronomy 34:9, Joshua is described as a man full of the “spirit of wisdom” (ESV). The context of this scene also includes the bestowal of this special gift from an external source, namely, the laying on of hands of Moses. Second, in Isaiah 11:2, in what is clearly a messianic passage, the Spirit of the LORD “rests” upon the one who is to come from the “shoot . . . of Jesse” (Isa 11:1). As a result of the Spirit of the LORD resting upon this figure, the text says that he will have the **רוּחַ חֲכָמָה וּבִינָה**, that is, the “Spirit of wisdom and understanding.”

Although the role of wisdom must not be ruled out of one's ability to perform something in a skillful manner, the context calls for a translation that best captures the craftsmanship of those who will be laboring on the construction of the tabernacle as well as forming Aaron's priestly adornment.

The relative clause ends and the thought process resumes with the insertion of וַיַּעֲשֵׂה (in order to make). Here, as in 28:2, עָשָׂה appears in the perfect tense as a preterite. The form indicates that the verb וַיַּעֲשֵׂה is completing the action which Moses is telling those whom God has filled with the "spirit of skill" to do. However, unlike the instance in 28:2, it functions as the main verb in a dependent clause and is prefixed with a waw-consecutive which serves as a subordinating conjunction; thus, the word functions syntactically as a purpose clause and is best translated as "in order to make."³² Therefore, God's endowment of certain persons with unique gifts of trade comes with a specific purpose, namely, to construct Aaron's garments without which he cannot be fitted for priestly service unto God.

The next dependent clause is introduced by a sequence of infinitive constructs. Both of them appear in the Piel stem, are prefixed with the preposition לְ, and end with a pronominal suffix of which Aaron serves as the antecedent. The first is לְקַדְּשׁוֹ (to consecrate him). Following the main verb (וַיַּעֲשֵׂה) of this dependent clause, לְקַדְּשׁוֹ, due to

³⁰HALOT, 2853.

³¹Driver renders the phrase רִיחַ חֵכְמָה as "spirit of wisdom," but then explains it by clarifying the meaning as "artistic skill." S. R. Driver, *The Book of Exodus*, Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges, reprint (Cambridge: University Press, 1918), 299.

³²van der Merwe, 299.

its prefixed לְ, functions complimentary to וַעֲשֵׂה and continues to disclose the purpose for which these garments are being made.³³ The second infinitive construct is לְכַהֵנוּ (so that he may minister as a priest). A basic understanding of לְכַהֵנוּ would definitely consist of interpreting this word's syntactical function as a result or consequence ultimately of the main verb. The act of consecration mentioned in the previous infinitive construct reveals a more specific purpose for making the “holy garments” for Aaron, but לְכַהֵנוּ points towards the end result of the entire process, that is, making it possible for Aaron to serve as a priest for God. Thus, with respect to the syntactical function of לְכַהֵנוּ, a modal understanding of this word best demonstrates the permissive nature of God's granting Aaron the opportunity to function as the head of his priesthood.³⁴ Therefore, the sum of both of God's delegations to Moses in Ex 28:2-3 to have “holy garments” made for Aaron pertains to enabling him to function as a priest unto God in a holy and glorious manner that resembles the beauty and wonder of the tabernacle, but even more so, the glory, beauty, and holiness of God.

³³Bruce K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 606.

³⁴Waltke and O'Connor observe that when an infinitive construct is prefixed with the preposition לְ and conveys a modal sense, the verbal noun is usually accompanied by a prepositional phrase. This point applies well to the usage of לְכַהֵנוּ in Ex 28:3 since the infinitive construct is immediately followed by the prepositional phrase לִי (for me). See additional examples in Waltke and O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 609. Moreover, with respect to both instances of the infinitive construct in 28:3, their syntactical functions are further supported by their appearances in the Piel stem. In the case of לְקַדְּשֵׁהוּ, the word functions in a factitive manner alluding to the causal nature of Aaron's consecration with respect to the role of the sacred vestments in his preparation. In the case of לְכַהֵנוּ, the verbal noun fulfills a function common to the Piel stem, that is, it is resultative inasmuch as the word further elucidates the end result of the process of Aaron's consecration to priesthood (van der Merwe, 80-81).

Theological Analysis

Although Exodus 28:2-3 only spans the territory of two brief verses of Scripture, the theological scope of its content is extremely broad. Therefore, this theological analysis intends in no way to be exhaustive of this passage's biblical-theological contributions. However, three main subjects in Ex 28:2-3 stand out among others as areas deserving of brief treatment.

First, returning to the theme of the parallelism between the seven acts of creation in Genesis 1 and the seven acts of the tabernacle in Exodus 25:1-31:18, Ex 28:2-3 falls into the narrative as part of the symbolic recreation of God's cosmic dwelling place and a chosen people, made in his image, who are placed in it to live there for himself. According to G. K. Beale, "Both the priest and the tabernacle were designed to represent the creative work of God" ³⁵ Before the Fall, all of creation, heaven and earth, served as the majestic cosmic temple of God. Man was placed in its innermost sanctuary, the Garden of Eden (i.e. the Holy of Holies), to worship, serve, and commune with God in holiness. In much the same way, the tabernacle was set up to resemble the pre-Fall configuration of the cosmos along with a priesthood covered in "holy garments" so that they might enter into God's presence and be his ministers. ³⁶ With respect to both the purpose of the creation of the cosmos and the tabernacle, God's intention is to dwell among his people (cf. Gen 1-2; Ex 25:8; 29:42-46; 40:34-38). Moreover, Beale posits that

³⁵G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, New Studies in Biblical Theology, ed. D. A. Carson, vol. 17 (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 39.

³⁶See also Kline's full discussion on this issue, who is for the most part in direct agreement with Beale's thesis. Kline upholds the belief that in comparison to the tabernacle's correspondence to the original "cosmos-temple," Aaron's priestly garments and function also symbolically point to his representation as "the personal image-temple of God (Kline, "Investiture with the Image of God," 41-43)."

“the redemptive-historical development may be explained as proceeding from God’s unique presence in the structural temple in the Old Testament to the God-man, Christ, the true temple.”³⁷ Furthermore, he teaches that as a consequence of Christ’s resurrection, the Holy Spirit is in the process of preparing creation and God’s people for the day when as before the work will “culminate in the eternal new heavens and earth as a paradisaal city-temple.”³⁸

Second, an obvious theological observation from Ex 28:2-3 is the relationship between the extravagance of Aaron’s vestments and the glory and beauty of God. The initial designation of the purpose for making “holy garments” in 28:2 is said to be “for glory and beauty.” Upon further explanation of the details of the garments’ components in 28:4-43, one may notice that the much of the material is the same as what is used in adorning the tabernacle. If the purpose of these choice materials in decorating the tabernacle is to reflect to the wonder of God, then it follows that this same purpose may be served in their addition to the priesthood’s wardrobe.³⁹ By bearing upon themselves “holy garments” made for the purpose of “glory and beauty” that are handcrafted by those whom God has filled with a “spirit of skill,” the Aaronic priesthood, especially the glorious vestments of the chief priest, appear to be “an embodiment, enactment, and representative of the purity and holiness of Yahweh’s self.”⁴⁰ Therefore, as mentioned at the beginning of the paper, God did not ordain the construction of the “holy garments” to

³⁷Beale, 392-93.

³⁸Ibid., 393.

³⁹Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission*, 41. Cf. 2 Chron 3:6.

⁴⁰Walter Brueggeman, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 665.

be beautiful simply for the sake of beauty; instead, the excellence and grandeur of their artistic qualities were meant to explicitly reflect God's glorious nature.

And third, in light of the NT's teaching on Jesus Christ's office as the Great High Priest, one may view the image of the Aaronic priesthood Ex 28:2-3 as a prefiguring of Christ's subsequent fulfillment of this role in the new covenant. The great lengths in which Moses leads the priests in becoming consecrated and prepared for priestly service unto God presents point towards man's utter inability to perfectly stand before God in a holy relationship bearing in himself the clear image of his Creator, thus without hindrance reflecting the glory and beauty of God. Vern S. Poythress eloquently intimates, "Majestic as he [Aaron] is, he is not majestic enough."⁴¹ The author of the letter to the Hebrews demonstrates with extensive treatment in Heb 4:18-10:39 the manner in which Christ fulfills, not only Aaron's position as the chief priest, but also the entire institution of the Israelite priesthood. Poythress continues to show how the nature of Aaron's priestly service and sacred vestments point towards the necessity of Christ's office as the Great High Priest:

In the development of Old Testament history, the priesthood itself fails to be truly consecrated (1 Samuel 2:30-36). Even Aaron himself fails in the incident of the golden calf (Exodus 32:2-6). The priests die and must be succeeded by others in a process of endless repetition. These priests are really only a shadow and copy of reality, just as the tabernacle itself is a shadow and copy of heaven. The real priest must be heavenly. That is, He must be a man from heaven, true God and true man (Hebrews 1:1-5). He is Himself the final union of heaven and earth, a Man who is the "radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being" (Hebrews 1:3).⁴²

⁴¹Vern S. Poythress, *The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1991), 54.

⁴²Ibid.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper is to conduct an exegetical study of Exodus 28:2-3 in order to determine the purpose of Aaron's artistically designed and crafted priestly garments. In summary, the sacred vestments symbolically represent the wonder of God's creation and the glory, beauty, and holiness of his nature. Without these garments, Aaron was incapable of becoming a priest before God. Christians today are positioned in Christ and are able to serve God on this earth in holiness as the new self is continually "being renewed after the image of its creator" (Col 3:10). Furthermore, in Jesus Christ, Christians are God's royal priesthood (1 Pet 2:9) who offer their bodies as living sacrifices to God as their spiritual act of worship (Rom 12:1) and who are to "proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness and into his marvelous light (1 Pet 2:9)."

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APPENDIX 1

AUTHOR'S TRANSLATION OF EXODUS 28:2-3

(2) Then, you shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother, for glory and beauty. **(3)** You shall speak to all of the skilled of heart, whom I have filled with a spirit of skill, in order to make Aaron's garments to consecrate him so that he may minister as a priest for me.

APPENDIX 2
EXEGETICAL OUTLINE

Text: Exodus 28:1-5

Exegetical Idea: God's requirement for Aaron to be a priest in his temple was that he be made holy.

Exegetical Outline:

1. God commands Moses to call Aaron and his sons out from among the Israelites to be his priests (28:1).
2. God commands Moses to make holy garments for Aaron for glory and beauty (28:2).
3. God commands Moses to make holy garments for Aaron to consecrate him for priesthood (28:2-3).
4. God commands Moses to make holy garments for Aaron and his sons in order for them to serve as priests (28:4b).

APPENDIX 3

HOMILETICAL OUTLINE

Text: Exodus 28:1-5

Title: Priests Before God

Homiletical Idea: Because man is sinful, Christians must be holy as God is holy in order to be priests before him.

Introduction:

- **Probing question:** What would you wear on your first day at work in the White House? A dirty white t-shirt? Old blue jeans with holes in the knees?
- Discuss the concept of “standards” and degrees of “expectations.”
- Read text.
- Prayer for illumination.

Message:

1. God has called his people to be his priests (28:1).
2. God has called his people to be priests who reflect his holy and glorious image (28:2).
3. God has called his people to be holy as a necessary qualification for them to be conferred as his priests (28:3).
4. God has called all Christians, not just certain leaders or pastors, to be holy as he is holy in order to serve as his priests (28:4b).

Conclusion:

- **Probing question:** How would you look right now to God if you entered his holy temple to serve him? Would you even make it into the outer courtyard? Have you been cleansed and consecrated by the work of Jesus Christ?
- Restate points.
- Closing prayer.