

Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 306

Exodus 28-29

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Episode Summary

The descriptions of the vestments worn by the priests of Israel, particularly the high priest, can make for uninteresting reading. But these two chapters of Exodus and their content put forth significant theological messaging. In this episode of the podcast we discuss how the priestly garments take us into the concepts of kingship, mediation, and mission to the nations outside Israel.

Transcript

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 306: Exodus 28 and 29. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey, Mike! How are you doing?

MH: Well, not much different than last time, Trey. How are you doing? [laughs] Your story's going to be more interesting than mine.

TS: I'm hanging in there. It's the new year, so... Technically you're driving right now.

MH: Technically I'm driving right now. As we record this, I'm thinking about driving, so it kind of fits. [laughs]

TS: I hope you didn't fall into the Grand Canyon.

MH: Yeah. Well, like I've told you before, I've seen it once at a reasonable distance so that's good enough for me. I'm not going anywhere near it. I have a brother though, who did the... how you walk down on that death-defying trail. He's an idiot anyway. I grew up with him, so I can say that. [TS laughs] There's no way I would do that. [laughs]

TS: Do they have rapids there, where you can go white water rafting?

MH: Where you can recover the bodies? Yeah, that have those. [laughs]

TS: We did that in Colorado one year as a family vacation. It was the first time we had ever done it. It was at Fort Collins, Colorado. It was a Level 4. I think they go up to 5. So we decided, "Eh, we'll go to 4 and make it exciting." So it's just me, my dad, my mom, and our guide. And it's pretty rough. I'm not going to lie. But that's what made it fun. Except our guide took us over to the side of the mountain where this water was flipping up, and it basically slingshot us out. And so out of the boat goes our guide and my dad. My mom is on my side of the boat. And I got knocked off, too, but my foot was hooked in. So I'm able to pull myself back up. I'm trying to grab my dad. I have one hand on the guide, trying to get him in. My mom's trying to help him back in the boat. My dad's just floating down the river now. So now we have to hustle and get him and pull everybody out. And the guide was so embarrassed, because he's never been thrown before. But I'm not going to lie: it was an adventure. I didn't know if my dad was dead, because it was rapids.

MH: That sounds like a whole lot of fun. [sigh] I just don't know why people do stuff like this.

TS: I think I was 16 or 17 at the time, and let me tell you, it was awesome. Sorry, Dad. It was fun.

MH: Sounds like it. You're not living unless you're almost dying, right? Is that it?

TS: That's right. That's how you know you're alive. You have to find that line and walk right up to it. And slowly back away.

MH: Sure. I'd rather have something that we used to call "common sense," but you know, I'll go with that.

TS: There you go.

MH: I'm sure, even though we're not driving yet, I'm sure we're not doing anything like that.

TS: That's why you have the PhD and I don't. [MH laughs]

MH: Yeah. I guess that fits somehow. Who knows?

TS: There you go. Well, Mike, we're getting close to the end here in Exodus.

MH: Yeah, 28 and 29. I don't know if people are realizing this, but after this one... We'll do 30 and 31 next time. Once you hit chapter 35-40, it's essentially a repetition of the 5-8 chapters that preceded it. So we're actually closer to the end than people might realize.

TS: Alright, Mike, I'm ready for Exodus if you are.

5:00

MH: Alright. Exodus 28 and 29 today. I'm not going to read through the chapters because that would be just really kind of dull. And in the course of doing what we're going to do today, you're going to hear lots (I would venture to say even most) of the details of the chapters anyway as we go through. But what I want to do is approach the issue of chapter 28—the garments that the priests were supposed to wear. And then chapter 29 is the ceremony that sanctifies them. So I want to sort of topically approach both of these chapters in terms of what we can get out of this. What's the biblical, theological messaging here? If you're new to the podcast, this is what we do, not just with chapters like this, but just generally. Because you can have just a narrative story. You can have stuff like this— descriptions of priests' clothing. The last time we were in Exodus, it was descriptions of the Tabernacle and the furniture. And it's easy to just read through that stuff and say, "Man, I'm glad I'm through that, because that's just kind of dull." But what we miss because we're not living back then—we're not part of that worldview, that environment, that culture—is the theological messaging of what's actually *in* the content. And so for the podcasts, this is what I try to focus on. I'm not going to drill down into specific phrases, for the most part. We're just going to take a look at the stuff and read it like someone living back then would, applying an ancient eye to it and what impressions— theologically, religiously—would they have gotten from this description over the course of these two chapters.

So with that in mind, I'm going to reference (at least in the first part of this episode) an article by Christophe Nihan and Julia Rhyder. It's titled "Aaron's Vestments in Exodus 28 and Priestly Leadership." This is from a book called *Debating Authority: Concepts of Leadership in the Pentateuch and the Former Prophets*. So it's a biblical scholarship book. It's not like a John Maxwell leadership book. So don't be misled by the title. This is a scholarly work on the ancient content of the Hebrew Bible and its wider environment. And this particular chapter in the book gets into the high priests' clothing and, in some respects, more generally, the priestly clothing. But we'll focus on the high priest here because there are a number of things about the description of what he wears that are significant, theologically, in terms of the religious messaging.

So they jump in this way. They're going to reference Manahem Haran, who wrote a very famous book called *Temples and Temple Service in Ancient Israel*. So that's how they're going to come out of the gate, referencing his work. But then they're going to veer pretty quickly into some of their own research—more recent. This is a 2018 book, so it's pretty up-to-date in terms of scholarship. So let's just jump in. They write this:

As M. Haran and others have observed, the various materials used in the fabrication of the tabernacle in the priestly account (Exod 25–31 and 35–40) comprise a complex and sophisticated system of classification...

Let me just stop there. So we've talked about this before, how there are different gradations of holiness that even are analogous to the gradations of holiness on the mountain itself. So they're referencing that from previous episodes. So they

...comprise a complex and sophisticated system of classification which plays a central role in the definition of different grades of sanctity inside the sanctuary itself. The fabrics used, as well as the way in which they are combined with other materials, are integral to this system. The description of the clothes of the high priest in Exod 28 clearly participates in this logic, but the way in which the fabrics used for these clothes actually index the high priest's agency within the sanctuary has not always been sufficiently recognized.

So let me stop there. What they're basically saying is, "Look, hey, you noticed that the Tabernacle has these different gradations of holiness (holiness zones)? And you noticed how those are analogous to Sinai? There are things to notice about the high priests' clothing that sort of accomplish the same task—that play into this perspective, this messaging that's in the descriptions of the sanctuary itself."

Essentially, Exod 28 differentiates four items of clothing that are common to all the priests – namely, the tunic, the sash, the headpiece, and the undergarments (Exod 28:39–43) – and four items that are unique to the high priest: the *ḥōšēn*, the *'ēpod*, the robe and the diadem (Exod 28:6–38).

Now I want to focus on the unique ones. So we're going to take a look, for the most part the rest of the way, at the high priests. So their article continues, when they get to that section, this way:

10:00

The *ḥōšēn*, or "breastpiece", is described as a folded cloth forming a square pouch, measuring one by one span and ornamented with twelve precious or semi-precious stones (more on this below), inside which the Urim and Thummim were placed (Exod 28:15–30; cf. Exod 39:8–21 MT). The *'ēpod*, for its part, designates an item comprising a strip of fabric around the waist and two strips of fabrics fastened around the shoulders, each of which is also ornamented with a precious stone (Exod 28:6–14; cf. Exodus 39:2–7 MT)...

The clothes that all the priests share are made of *šēš*-linen, which presumably designates a superior type of linen (Haran 1978, 174; Propp 2006, 452); the only exception is the undergarments, which are made of *bad*-linen. The four items that are specific to Aaron are also made of *šēš*-linen but are distinguished by their inclusion of other, additional fabrics: the robe of the *'ēpod* as well as the cord which fastens the diadem to the headpiece are made of *tākēlet*, which presumably refers to a sort of bluish or greenish purple; whereas the breastpiece

and the *'ēpod* are made of *tākēlet*, *'argāmān* (another kind of purple, perhaps more reddish) as well as *tôla'at šāni*, or crimson (Exod 28:6,8,15,28)...

Let me just stop there. So they're saying, "Look, all the priests have garments in common. But then there are some elements that are added to what the high priest wears that are different." And you've probably already noticed because of the coloration (some of these terms) that there's going to be an alignment with certain parts of the Tabernacle. So this is going to be part of the argument—that what the high priest wears is going to be analogous to certain zones in the Tabernacle (gradations of holiness). So the article continues this way:

The different fabrics used for the high priest and the other priests correspond to the fabrics used for the confection of different parts of the sanctuary. The *šēš-*linen, with which the main vestments worn by all the priests (tunic, sash and headpiece) are made, is already used for the fabrication of the curtains of the outer court. The mixture of blue, purple and crimson yarns which distinguishes the confection of the breastpiece from that of the *'ēpod* is also used for the confection of the curtains of the sanctuary (Exod 26:1; cf. 36:8 MT) as well as of the three veils that delineate the outer court, the outer-sanctum and the inner-sanctum (Exod 26:31,36; 27:16). Additionally, the robe of the *'ēpod* and the cord of the headpiece are made of bluish purple (*tākēlet*) alone, which is the dye used for the laces holding together curtains of the sanctuary (Exod 26:4). The same association between Aaron's clothes and the sanctuary is furthered by the designation of the breastpiece and the *'ēpod* as *ma'āšēh ḥōšēb*, "the work of a skilled designer" (Exod 28:6,15)...

Let me just stop there. So those things... There isn't a whole lot that's mentioned or described this way. But Aaron's clothes and the sanctuary are described that way. They are "the work of a skilled designer." Back to the article:

["The work of a skilled designer" is] an expression which is otherwise used only to describe the fabrication of the curtains of the sanctuary and its innermost veil (Exod 26:1,31). Additionally, the confection of the breastpiece and the *'ēpod* includes a fifth element, namely gold (*zāhāb*), which apparently refers to golden threads woven into these vestments as the description in Exod 39:3 makes clear. The mention of gold has no parallel in the fabrics used for the tabernacle but closely associates Aaron's clothes with the materials used either for the objects placed inside the sanctuary, such as the ark, the table [MH: (the bread of the presence)] and the luminary [MH: (or the lampstand)], or for the elements that comprise the structure of the sanctuary itself, such as the planks, the columns and the hooks...

These observations suggest that the fabrics involved in the confection of the priestly clothes are part of a comprehensive system which indexes the differentiated roles, status and agency of the high priest and the priests. Whereas

the fabrics used for the other priests associate them with the outer court, the materials involved in the confection of Aaron's clothes uniquely associate him with the sanctuary [MH: (the inner part)]. The association of the priests and the high priest with different spaces corresponds in turn to their different roles within the cult [MH: the word "cult" used in biblical studies refers to those who do rituals—just the ritual system]: while the priests' main cultic duties comprise the offering of the community's sacrifices in the outer court, Aaron assumes unique responsibilities within the sanctuary... The important point, here, is that the fabrics used for Aaron's vestments do not merely symbolize his privileged access to, and unique agency within, the sanctuary: in the priestly conception, they literally enable it. While the mixture of various fabrics for the confection of the curtains and the veils of the sanctuary marks off this space as being particularly holy, and therefore inaccessible to humans, the donning of such vestments grants Aaron a permanent right of entry within that space. As such, the description of the fabrics in Exod 28 simultaneously makes human agency possible within the sanctuary while also restricting this agency to one central agent, the high priest, who is identified by his clothes.

Now let's just stop there for a moment. Think about that. The high priest is clearly distinct—clearly different—corresponding to the Most Holy Place. And we know from Leviticus 16 and some other things we've talked about that only he can do certain things at certain times of the year. So like they say here, it goes beyond symbolizing privileged access and unique agency. These garments literally enable his access to these parts (or equip him). So everything else is inaccessible.

And when you think about Jesus... Let's just go back to the series on Hebrews and Jesus—the role of the high priest. When you look at something like this (that Jesus has this unique mediatorial role—which of course he does)... But if you're thinking in this mode about the high priest and you're a Jew reading the book of Hebrews and all this talk about Jesus and the high priest after the order of Melchizedek, who was also a king... And we're going to get to that in a moment, because there's something about the garments that relates to royalty. If you think about it that way, then he's not only the mediator and his sacrifice is better and the stuff that the book of Hebrews says more transparently, but if you're in tune with this sort of worldview, what you're also picking up is that he is just unique by definition—that there's only one of those. [laughs] There can be only one of those. So it casts just a different light on how the high priest was viewed, and consequently when we get to the book of Hebrews, how Jesus would've been thought of in a Jewish system, in their worldview, how they remembered or thought about... They're dealing with the Second Temple. But it's part memory and it's part that it's still around as an institution and a life. But it would have meant a little bit more as far as how—just the utter uniqueness of it. And since there's only one in their system and then you have this guy Jesus come along

and he sort of usurps... Not in an *incorrect* way, but he actually is the *better* unique one. [laughs] It just casts it in a different light.

20:00

Let's talk a little bit about the ephod. Now the article by Nihan and Rhyder gets into the specifics of the clothing as it goes on. I want to pull out a few things here because what they say here is... They take a lot of pains in their article to basically make the point that, "Hey, lots of people have missed this connection." And more recent scholarship has really done more with it. And so I want to pull this out as far as the ephod and see how this combines with kingship. Now we know the high priest wasn't king. Israel doesn't have a king. I'm of the view that kingship in Israel wasn't disallowed by the Torah. I think there are reasons why the Torah has rules for kingship. I think that's assumed by God within the system. The one thing that's unique about the Israelite king... We'll just take a little rabbit trail here, because we all think of the passage in Samuel where God says to Samuel when the people want a king... They want a king to be like the other nations. And that's the crucial thing. You have to ask yourself in what way... When God tells Samuel, "Look, they haven't rejected you. They've rejected me from being their king." Well, in what way? Because we have these rules in the Torah about, "Hey, here's what a good king looks like." So you would think this has been anticipated. So why is God torqued? Well, if you actually read the passage in Samuel, there's this phrasing about, "They want somebody who will go out and come in, to be like the other nations." What that means is they want a commander-in-chief. They want a guy who would lead the army out to battle and then come back in. And the whole point of the Exodus narrative and everything that's gone up really to the period of the Judges, through the conquest, is that God is the one who fights for Israel. Yes, there's Joshua, but he takes his orders from God. When he doesn't, everybody pays the price. So God is viewed as the one who fights for Israel. He's the divine warrior. And that's important, because when the people say, "We don't want that. We want only this. We want to be like the other nations in this particular way." Then that's a big deal. Because if you go back to the rules for being a good king, that language about the going out and coming in really is underplayed or in some cases some would argue that it's not even there. Because God is the warrior who fights for Israel. He's the actual commander-in-chief. He is the Lord of Hosts, is the point. And the hosts (under his leadership) fight for Israel. So when that's rejected, that's the sticking point in Samuel, not just having a king per se.

But coming back from the excursus there (the rabbit trail), there are things about the high priest that dip into royal imagery. And that's not to make the priest be a king or the king a priest. But you can already see kind of where this is going. If you've listened to the podcast for a while, you're going to know that I take the view (and none of this is unique to me) that the priesthood of Aaron was a concession—that originally there was going to be one leader who would be both king and priest and all that stuff, because that was the pattern (before Moses and with Moses). And we have this problem with Moses in Exodus 4. And God says, "Okay, we'll put Aaron into the picture." So the priesthood is a concession. But

even with that concession, there are going to be things about it that dip into the royal imagery. So you've got Adam, you've got Melchizedek, you had Moses. You have these single figures that combine both elements, until you get to Moses and Aaron. Then it splits up. You can go back and listen to the episode on Exodus 4 and some of that material just to get the idea. But even with the split-up, there are still indicators (and I would say this is theological messaging in the context of what has preceded it in the Hebrew Bible) that there's still royal imagery here. And that's going to become important because later on, you're going to have the Messiah who is the son of David. And he's not from Levi but according to Psalm 110 (and, of course, the book of Hebrews), he is also high priest after the order of Melchizedek, who was a king and a priest. So basically, you're going to go back to where the two are fused into one.

And if you think about believers, as well (another rabbit trail), we are a kingdom of *priests* and we also will *rule* with Jesus. So even with *us*, the two are combined. Moses and Aaron are the anomaly. [laughs] That's where it gets split into two things. Everywhere else it's, like, a fusion. So just take that away for what it's worth.

But let's go to the ephod and see what Nihan and Rhyder have to say here about this. Because this is the part that really takes us into this issue. They write about the precious stones in the ephod on the breastpiece that's part of the ephod and tied together with the ephod—all that stuff. And the ephod itself had stones on it.

Precious stones were not only associated with kings and high-ranking officials in the Western Asian world [MH: Western Asia would be Middle East or ancient Near East in our parlance] but also, and even primarily, with deities. (Imes forthcoming).

And this is a very recent article. So they actually reference Carmen Imes' book in reference here. But I can't pull that out because it's packed, or else I would've read you what Carmen said. But they actually reference Carmen's book in a footnote. She's tracking on this, too. So we have this thing where precious stones are part of kingship, high-ranking officials, and deities.

25:00

In particular, the embroidering of stones on ceremonial clothes is reminiscent of the clothes confected for statues of deities. Although in Assyria this practice was gradually extended to the ceremonial clothes of the kings in the Neo-Assyrian period, it always remained primarily associated with the statues of deities as A. L. Oppenheim showed in a seminal article (Oppenheim 1949; more recently, Matsushima 1993; also Maggio 2012 on the ornamentation of divine statues in the paleo-Babylonian period). The practice of embroidering precious stones on the clothes of deities is well attested in Babylonia during the Neo-Babylonian period – a context which is of particular relevance for P – especially in

connection with the *kusītu*, a garment reserved for goddesses and worn by Ishtar in her sanctuary of Uruk and in other sanctuaries as well...

Let me just stop there. Now you're familiar with JEDP. We talked about this very recently with the whole issue of the Tabernacle construction. Most scholars want to see most of what's going on here as very late. P is considered the latest—the last—source. So this is reflected in that quotation there, as well. Even if you don't attach chronology to it, basically we can make the comment that, "Okay, we've got Assyria; we have Babylon. There are clear parallels. There are clear footholds in this description of the ephod with Mesopotamia. (Let's just make our language as broad as possible.) And not only with their kings but also with the practice of deities. It's kind of interesting that you get the high priest dressed like a divine figure or a king." So just hold on to that thought.

While it has occasionally been argued on the basis of these parallels that the description of Aaron's clothes with their ornamentations of gold and precious stones would intimate that the high priest is construed as the image of the deity, this suggestion arguably goes too far. Contrary to the divine image in Western Asian cults the high priest is not the object of rituals and does not receive sacrifices. Nevertheless, the point remains that the bearing of precious or semi-precious stones can index superhuman agency in the Hebrew Bible.

Now I have a few comments about this here. I would say, "You better believe it's overstated." Let me go back and read this.

While it has occasionally been argued on the basis of these parallels that the description of Aaron's clothes with their ornamentations of gold and precious stones would intimate that the high priest is construed as the image of the deity...

Well, in P... I think we're missing something. If we adopt JEDP and we go back to Genesis 1, who is the image of the deity? That would be everybody. The "image of God" idea democratizes the divine image idea. Now granted, when Israel gets a cult (a ritual system of sacrifices and offerings and other services), basically to teach the people about sacred space, sanctify sacred space, and protect sacred space (all that stuff we've talked about up to this point), then you have to have a subset of individuals that will do what's necessary to purge sacred space from defilement—protect people from traversing on to sacred space. You have to be able to teach the concept of sacred space somehow, because you're not all going to live at the mountain. You're not all going to live at the cosmic mountain (Sinai). The Tabernacle is a mobile cosmic mountain on the way to Canaan where it will be reinstalled in a temple which is designed to be another cosmic mountain (Mount Zion) so then the mobile cosmic abode becomes non-mobile. It's supposed to be permanent. So you have to have these things. And even when it's permanent, just as Sinai, there were gradations of holiness. When you get to Mount Zion and you build the Temple, you're going to

have the same thing. Because the Tabernacle and the Temple are going to imitate these gradations of holiness that were on the mountain. Why? Well, it's designed to teach the people that there is space that is *uncommon*, because God's presence is here. So they're not at the point yet where we are in the New Testament, where believers individually and collectively are referred to as the Temple of God. We're not there yet. Believers are living stones. What are temples made of? Stones. The language in the New Testament is deliberate. Jesus is the cornerstone; the rest of us are the stones of the Temple, which is the body of Christ, which is the Church, which is us. And this is why... I think this whole concept... And it's a transparent trajectory.

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Let me riff again—go off on a little excursus here. All the talk about building a new temple in Jerusalem... If you're fixated on that (and lots of theological systems are, namely like a dispensational approach), chances are all this other stuff is new. And this other stuff is actually *in* the Bible. [laughs] I hate to disappoint you. But it's in the Bible. Why do we need a new temple when we've already had the outcome to that? Well, what about Ezekiel 40 and 48? Go back and listen to the two episodes of the podcast we did on that. There are significant problems with viewing that literally and there's a ton of cool stuff if you don't view it literally that hook into the New Testament and just the wider cosmic theological worldview of the Bible. I'm not one that's looking for a new temple in a millennium. I don't think you *need* a temple to have the kingdom of God on earth—to have the global Eden. In fact, when we get to the global Eden, there is no temple. Revelation 21 actually says that, point-blank. There is no temple. "I saw no temple there." Because we don't need one. So without drifting off into eschatology, that's not to say that a third Temple won't be built. It might. I don't think it's part of an End Times scenario at all. That doesn't mean that the Jews who want this won't have it. They might get it. They might set off a war by doing so. But there you go. We have lots of other temple language in here. And by the way, if you get a new temple built, that one has to be destroyed, too, because in the end, there is no temple. John says that point-blank in Revelation. So everybody wants to think about the temple, build the temple, do this, do that. And they don't even realize, "Well, that has to be destroyed, too." [laughs] You know? There's a lot of other stuff going on here that, if you're thinking wider (and honestly more cosmically), rather than just what your eyes can see in front of you... ("Oh, I see bricks in a building and mortar and now I know the temple's real.") Well, the cosmic temple is just as real—the whole idea. And to say that if you're not expecting a literal temple, you're not respecting the Bible, hey, the Church is the Temple. Paul says that, like, five or six times. And guess what? We exist. Believers are literally in existence. So this literalism versus non-literalism false dichotomy is just that. It's false. It's phony. And it really deflects attention away from some really important things. And here we go. So we have the high priest who is dressed in a certain way in the ancient Near East. We've got this association with, "Okay, he's dressed sort of like the way other cultures would dress a deity. But he's not a deity; he's a human. But yet he's the only one (the single one) allowed in the sacred space." The authors of

the article are forgetting Genesis 1:26 here somehow, where that passage democratizes this. And so I think that their conclusion is a little off—a little overstated or incomplete I think is a better way to say it. And for that reason, plus another omission they have in the article, I want to get us into a second article, because this whole thing about democratizing being the image is important. It is a component part of something else in Exodus that, believe it or not, Nihan and Rhyder don't mention. And that is the "kingdom of priests" idea in Exodus 19. This idea needs in some way to be consistent with or work in tandem with what we've discovered about the way the priests are dressed and the high priest in particular is dressed. It reflects gradations in sanctity. That's very easy to see because of the materials of the garments that they wear. But when it comes to the messaging of the high priest himself, he's not the only image of the deity because of Genesis 1—because of humanity being created as God's image. And we also can't say he's the only one, as well, because Israel's supposed to be a kingdom of priests. And then, of course, those wider concepts fit very nicely into what comes later in the Second Temple period and, of course, in the New Testament.

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Now with that in mind, I think what we want to take away from Nihan and Rhyder is the matching of the zones of holiness and that what the priest wears is connected to royalty. Because there are two other... Just don't lose the point. In the wider ancient Near Eastern world, who gets dressed like the high priest of Israel does? Well, that would be kings and gods—kings and deities. So we don't want to lose that trajectory, but we want to start working our way toward how this works with the kingdom-of-priests idea. So one more quotation from Nihan and Rhyder before we transition here. They write:

Some elements of the high priest's vestments are effectively reminiscent of royalty [MH: they've already hinted at that with the kings of Babylon and Assyria], as per the diadem placed on Aaron's forehead [MH: that's certainly a royal image], the association of the *ḥōšēn* [MH: the breastpiece] with cosmic order, and other features as well. However, this does not mean that this line of analysis can be extended to each and every aspect of Aaron's vestments.

That's all true. It's good. But their article doesn't really take us into the corporate nature of the priest language, which I think is a significant omission. So for this, I'm going to reference another source: John A. Davies. His book is called *A Royal Priesthood: Literary and Intertextual Perspectives on an Image of Israel in Exodus 19:6*. So the whole book is about Exodus 19:6. This is far and away the most detailed treatment of Exodus 19:6, which I will read:

⁶'and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.

This is God talking to Moses. So there's a whole book on this. This is a good example of how a monograph (a book on a single subject) goes way, way, way beyond a commentary (even a good commentary). This is far and away the most detailed book on this subject that is in print. And for those of you who might be interested in getting it, you're going to have to know some Hebrew to work through this, even though he translates most of his terms. But still, you're going to see Hebrew in it. It might feel like an obstacle. But it's still worth getting. It's going to be a pricey academic book, but there you go. You can get it in Logos as well. So if you're interested in this topic, this is the one to get: John A. Davies, *A Royal Priesthood*. I'm going to read a little bit from his section on the priestly regal vestments. Even the header (Regal Vestments)... What he's angling for... He's going to be doing the same thing that Nihan and Rhyder did with linking the priest by virtue of what he wears with royalty. He's going to be doing that but he's going to take the discussion in different directions here. He writes this:

The depiction of the priest in his vestments can only be described as regal in character. As with the tabernacle and its furnishings, the priestly vestments have also proved a fruitful area for fertile imaginations, but there are a number of good sober treatments of both the physical descriptions and the significance these descriptions seem designed to convey, and it is not proposed to cover this ground again in any detail. A few instances will suffice to demonstrate that such garments and such materials of which they were made were otherwise associated with royalty, or at the least with the wealthy and influential aristocracy, or were restricted to special occasions such as weddings, when a bridegroom may perhaps be 'king (or priest) for a day' (Isa. 61:10).

**¹⁰I will greatly rejoice in the LORD;
my soul shall exult in my God,
for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation;
he has covered me with the robe of righteousness,
as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress,
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.**

40:00

The breastpiece, for example (Exod. 28:15–30), appears to reflect those worn by the Pharaohs and the Syrian kings who imitated the Pharaohs... The מצנפת ('turban', Exod. 28:4) or צניף ('turban', Zech. 3:5) [MH: there's a slight difference in the Hebrew terminology there, but both of those reference the turban...], with its attached ציץ ('rosette') or נזר ('diadem', Exod. 29:6; 39:30; Lev. 8:9) was likewise, apart from its use by the priests, restricted to kings, or the aristocracy (2 Sam. 1:10; 2 Kgs 11:12; Isa. 3:23; Isa. 62:3; Ezek. 21:31 [ET 21:26]; Ps. 132:18). Philo understood this diadem as a symbol of vice-regency.

Philo is a Second Temple Jewish writer, 1st century B.C. or thereabouts. He understood this diadem that the high priest wears as a symbol of vice-regency. Co-rule. Co-regency.

Kaufmann observes: 'the priestly diadem (שיש "rosette", called *nēzer* "crown" in Lev. 8:9) and anointing...

Catch that. The priest wears a crown (a diadem) and he's anointed. Doesn't this sound like kingship here? It's easy to miss, but when you think about it, it does.

...are genuine points of contact between the priesthood and the monarchy. But these symbols are not in themselves signs of authority, but of sanctity and importance.' [MH: That's an important qualification.]...

The overall effect of the accounts of the priestly regalia (Exod. 28–29; 39; Lev. 8) with their fine materials, their gold and their precious stones is to provide the reader with a mental image of the 'glory and honour' (Exod. 28:2, 40) such clothing represented...

More significantly, not only was it in general terms the clothing of royalty, but there is a close correspondence between the priestly clothing and the materials of the sanctuary as they would appear from within, such that the priest was appropriately attired to enter a renewed cosmos and stand in the presence of the divine resident of this cosmic temple.

Let me just stop there. We've talked before about how the Tabernacle is mobile sacred space. It is a mobile cosmic mountain. It is a mobile cosmic garden. The decorations within go right back to Eden. We've spent a good bit of time in this series here on Exodus about these ideas and how they are conveyed. So I'm going to read that sentence again.

More significantly, not only was it in general terms the clothing of royalty, but there is a close correspondence between the priestly clothing and the materials of the sanctuary as they would appear [MH: from inside] from within, such that the priest was appropriately attired to enter a renewed cosmos and stand in the presence of the divine resident of this cosmic temple.

This is where you get the idea... You can read this kind of thing in Second Temple Jewish writers about how when the veil tears, it's a tear in the fabric of the cosmos. And you think, "Well, that's just kind of a funky, flaky... It's a wooden structure. It's a shack with some hairy garments over it." No, it's designed *by* its design to be sort of the microcosm of the macrocosm. It's a cosmic thing. It's a deliberate small mimicking of the place where God *really* lives, which is the cosmos. Okay? So the cosmos comes to earth in this little square, rectangular

building. This is the idea that they're trying to convey, not only in Israel, but every system's working with the same set of ideas. And maybe it's easier... If you're really into Egyptian stuff, you can see it with Egyptian temples a little bit better. But the same thing's going on in Israel. It's intentional. It's deliberate. It's a mimicking of the cosmic garden/mountain. That's where the Tabernacle and the Temple is and, of course, Mount Sinai and how that is analogous to the zones in the Tabernacle. All that stuff. It's all part of the matrix of ideas. So back to Davies, he's going to talk about the vocabulary of the place and of some of the garments now.

The terms כבוד ('glory') and תפארת ('honour') which form an *inclusio* around the account of the vestments in Exodus 28 (vv. 2, 40) [MH: so Exodus 28:2 and Exodus 28:40 have these terms at the beginning and the end—it bookends the chapter] are both also used of the glory theophany of Yhwh himself (for כבוד see Exod. 24:16–17; Isa. 4:5; Ps. 57:6 [ET 57:5]; for תפארת [root פאר] see Isa. 63:15; Pss. 71:8; 96:6; 1 Chron. 29:11; note especially Isa. 46:13 where God grants his תפארת to Israel)...

So let me just... Think about that. We have terms used in Exodus 28 of the priestly garments at the beginning and at the end, bookending the chapter, that are also used of the presence of God himself—the theophany of Yahweh himself. Continuing with Davies:

45:00

When the high priest entered the most holy place, that is, the throne room of Yhwh, he was dressed differently from when he ministered daily in the holy place. For this most intimate of encounters with God, the high priest wore garments of בל [MH: *bad* (pronounced *bahd*)] ('linen', Lev. 16:4), which according to *Yom*. 3.6 [MH: a rabbinic source—the Yoma] were white in colour. The plain linen seems to mark a degree of holiness greater even than the royal finery of the regular vestments.

That's essentially what Nihan and Rhyder were pointing out—that there are differences here.

The Egyptian priesthood also considered linen garments to be particularly sacred (cf. Gen. 41:42; 2 Sam. 6:14). Linen garments or white garments are the characteristic attire of angels, the heavenly counterparts to earthly priests when they make their appearances as divine envoys and when they are pictured as attending upon the heavenly throne (Ezek. 9:2–3, 11; 10:2; Dan. 10:5; 12:6–7; 1 En. 87.2; 90.22; 2 En. 22.8–10; Rev. 15:6). Haran writes of the high priestly linen garments: 'These garments serve to indicate a kind of dialectical elevation into that sphere which is beyond even the material, contagious holiness characterizing

the tabernacle and its accessories’. [Roland] De Vaux writes, ‘The priest, therefore, had quitted the profane world, and entered into a sacred realm’.

The Enochic literature depicts the angelic ‘Watchers’ as heavenly priests (e.g. *1 En.* 14.22–23), and the identification of priests as ‘other-worldly’ is in fact widespread in Second Temple Judaism. The Jewish group responsible for some liturgical texts found at Qumran shared the viewpoint that angels and earthly priests have closely corresponding roles.

Let me just stop there. All of that should be familiar to this audience. We’ve covered topics where I mentioned the angelic priesthood idea at Qumran—the people at Qumran who left the Temple in the early century or two B.C., who split from the Pharisees and the Sadducees and everybody else because of the calendar. We think, “What a bunch of nuts! Who cares? It’s a serviceable calendar. Why do you care so much?” The people at Qumran, whoever they were (the best guess is the Essenes), go out into the middle of the desert to live. That’s not actually completely why they did this. Because what they do, (just to do this as briefly as possible) is... The people at Qumran held to a 364-day calendar. And they knew it was different than the astronomical calendar, which is 365 ¼ days. They knew that. They didn’t care. “God’s calendar is 364 days.” They actually blamed the Watchers and their transgression of heaven and earth with screwing up the calendar and throwing things out of whack so that the astronomical year is now 365 ¼ days. Anyway, 364 is God’s calendar—four quadrants of 90 days with one day in between each; you get 364. If you start the calendar on day four (which is when the sun is created back in Genesis), that means that all the Sabbaths every year will fall on the same day of the calendar, all of the festivals of the priestly calendar will fall on the same day every year. Everything is in sync. It is mathematically perfect. It requires no adjustment. They thought it reflected the mind of God because it was perfect. Every year nothing changes. It’s unchangeable. It’s immutable. And they would mock or criticize the Pharisees or whoever else was doing the service in the actual Temple, “Every now and then you have to throw in a 13th month to make the thing realign, and then you have to figure this out so you can figure out Passover and you have to do math and you have to roll dice...” They would poke fun at this and criticize it basically say, “You have a human calendar. We have a divine one.” And they actually split over there.

50:00 So they went out in the desert and pretended to have a Temple. And they followed every ritual that was supposed to be performed in the Temple out in the desert by themselves. Why? Because they believed they as the earthly holy ones were responsible for keeping heaven and earth connected ritually—like the cosmos is going to come burning down if they don’t do this. That’s how seriously they took it. And what I just read from Davies here is you will find... He’s right. This paragraph is correct. You will find this stuff in Second Temple literature—the Dead Sea Scrolls (called in academia), the idea of the angelic priesthood on

earth—the earthly angelic priesthood. These things were to be kept in sync. “As in heaven, so on earth.” And they really believed that they were the earthly counterparts of what was going on in heaven, which is why they cared about measuring time. And they look up into the skies and they’re thinking, “Those divine beings who are still loyal to God who are not falling stars... What’s going on up there, we need to be in sync with that” and so on and so forth. And they’re going to use what they see, as well, to align with the mathematical calendar, but not the astronomical one, because it got thrown out of whack because of the Watchers and so on. There’s a whole set of ideas here that are kind of mind-blowing, actually, and mind-numbing in the level of detail that it can take you in.

But to focus here on Exodus 28 and 29, what Davies is saying here is that this is how they viewed the Tabernacle and the way the high priest is dressed when he’s in there, different from the earthly priests, and even on this one day of the year and it’s a little bit different... This is why they do it. This is the thought that goes behind it. The Holy Place (and the Most Holy Place, especially) was like entering a different cosmic realm.

Now please, don’t misquote me and say, “Mike thinks there was a portal to another dimension in the Holy of Holies.” I don’t. That’s ridiculous. It’s nonsense. We’re talking about theological concepts here. The notion is that the two are connected, but we’re not talking about, “Hey, do I have the right jumpsuit on so I don’t get burned up when I...” We’re not talking about a stargate here. We’re *not* talking about that. So having said that, the *idea* of the connection is still important and it’s reflected in the way the priests get dressed, what they’re thinking about, their roles, so on and so forth. Now Davies goes on from this. And he writes this:

The central concern of this work [MH: his book] is with the expression ממלכת כהנים [kingdom of priests] contained in Exod. 19:6. As noted earlier [MH: again, in his book], it is part of a divine declaration which spells out what it means for Israel, as distinct from the other nations, to be God’s special treasure.

Of the categorizations of the realistic options for the meaning of ממלכת כהנים [MH: kingdom of priests], the list put forward by Scott may be taken as representative. According to Scott, ממלכת כהנים may mean [MH: here are the five options for what kingdom of priests can mean]:

1. ‘a kingdom composed of priests’ (by which Scott understands those who individually have access to God as may be implied by the New Testament references); or
2. ‘a kingdom possessing a legitimate priesthood’; or
3. ‘a kingdom with a collective priestly responsibility on behalf of all peoples’; or
4. ‘a kingdom ruled by priests’; or
5. ‘a kingdom set apart and possessing collectively, alone among all

peoples, the right to approach the altar of Yahweh' [MH: who is the true God]

Now he has a lot to say about all of these options in his book. He's going to land on #5. And of course #1 and #5 are kind of transparently... There's a lot of biblical theology hanging in both of those. But just to stick to the content of the book as it pertains to these two chapters we're talking about, Davies writes elsewhere:

Though it has been largely and inexplicably overlooked, an answer lies ready to hand in the accounts of royal or divine grant of kingly authority such as are found in numerous ancient Near Eastern texts, including the Bible.

55:00 What that sentence is saying is, "How do we balance this idea of priestly authority, kingly authority... You have two separate offices in Israel, but then you have this statement that Israel itself collectively is a kingdom of priests. How does all this work together?" And what he's going to do is say, "Look. All of the authority is granted by a single king (who is Yahweh) to people." So the authority is derivative. And you actually have #5 working here because only Israel is allowed to approach the true God. Only Israel is in this position. Only Israel has been granted this privilege, granted the authority that comes with it on earth, granted the role of mediation that's implied in "kingdom of priests" to the other nations. Only Israel fits all those characterizations. So he's saying, "If we look to the analogy of ancient Near Eastern royal grant treaties (which we have talked about before on this podcast), that's the way all these ideas come together."

In such texts either the great king or the god grants the office of kingship to a specific mortal king or lesser deity who then exercises his rule under the aegis and protection of the deity or monarch. Israel, on this analogy, would be a corporate monarch, enjoying the grant of this status and the patronage of Yhwh...

We may tentatively conclude that there are good reasons to take ממלכת כהנים [MH: kingdom of priests] to mean a collective royal company consisting of 'priests' כהנים. [MH: That's Exodus 19:6; there you combine both elements.] Israel is designated as royal by one who supremely holds the position of Israel's king. [MH: That would be God.] It is the people of God as a whole who bear this royal dignity and honour. Individuals enjoy these privileges only insofar as they belong to the group.

Let me just stop there. This is why... It's not just enough for Israel to be described as royal (the son of God, collectively). This filiative language (son of God) is how God refers to Israel in Exodus when Moses and Aaron are before Pharaoh: "Let my son go out into the desert to worship me." Hosea 11: "Out of Egypt I have called my son." But that's not sufficient. Israel also has to be not just

royalty (royal sons and daughters, as it were), but they have to be priests. Why? Because initially, the image-of-God status was conferred to all humans. There was no Israel in the beginning. Israel arose out of the circumstances of specifically the last, but really all three supernatural human rebellions that we get in Genesis 1-11. Israel is the kickstarting of an Edenic vision. So the king (God) kickstarts Israel to be his son (his child) collectively through Abraham (supernatural assistance to do that) and therefore, it is sort of Adam and Eve. It's the original plan—the original vision—in kernel form. It's like an acorn. It's going to grow into something else. But for God to be faithful to his original vision where he made all humans part of his family, this new rendition of it has to also serve as mediators to everybody else. That's why they are a royal kingdom, yes. The word "kingdom" implies royalty. But they're also priests. And so when you get Aaron, who is the chief representative of the Israelite religious system, for sure he's a priest because he's doing this stuff on our behalf with God. We're learning about sacred space and all that stuff. But the way he's dressed also conveys royalty. In this one guy, he's sort of the microcosm of the bigger idea. He's the chief (catch this) representative of what God really wants. God wants a huge family where everybody is royal and everybody has access to his presence. Everybody plays that part of the priestly role (the access part).

And doesn't it make sense—isn't it required—that the Messiah, who is the king of Israel, also has to play a high priestly role? He has to fit into this mold. And when we get that with Jesus, lo and behold, the Gospels start to talk about Jesus' body as the Temple. And after the resurrection, the body of Christ (the Church) is collectively the children of God. All of these concepts interlock. These are threads of biblical theology that you have to start to see them. Once you see them, you can't unsee them. You're going to be able to see how ideas connect to each other, how things interlock and intertwine. And it is *not* an accident.

1:00:00

So even in the way that the high priest is dressed, it's supposed to make you think of royalty and priesthood combined. Because that's going to play a role in how we view the Messiah and how we view Jesus and what the writer of Hebrews and other New Testament writers are saying. It looks goofy sometimes what they're saying in the New Testament. The reason it looks goofy is we don't have the rest of this in our heads. They're not just making it up at that point either, when they're writing New Testament books. They're playing familiar threads. They're adding their own material to the tapestry (if I can use that metaphor) to what has preceded. They're not innovating. They're being consistent. They're adding to. They're complementing. They're not innovating.

So the point of what Davies was saying is, "Look, all of this is consistent. All of it is necessary. The priesthood is a microcosm of the macrocosm. Israel's corporate role to the nations, as the priesthood, mediated between Yahweh and his human family, within Israel—that family (the group) mediated between God and the nations." This is the important point.

Now as far as the ritual itself... We're getting a little long here so I'm only going to give you one point about the ritual (which I think is kind of interesting) in Exodus 29. Sarna, in his commentary about verse 13... I'm going to read you Exodus 29:13 and then we will call it an episode because we're getting a little bit long here. There's just lots of stuff to talk about and think about. But in the ceremony, of course, you have a sacrifice and then there are instructions on what to do with the blood and parts of the sacrifice and whatnot. In verse 13 we read this:

¹³ And you shall take all the fat that covers the entrails [MH: of the sacrificed animal], and the long lobe of the liver, and the two kidneys with the fat that is on them, and burn them on the altar.

You say, "That's kind of gross. Big deal." Well, what's interesting about this is what Sarna has here. Some of you might be familiar with this idea. We probably mentioned it a little bit in Leviticus. But here we go again. The Hebrew translated essentially the "lobe of the liver" (the protuberance of the liver)...

... literally means the redundance of [or] upon the liver. In Mishnah Tamid 4:3 the same is called "the finger of the liver," and without doubt the reference is to the *lobus caudatus*. The requirement to remove and burn this part is quite likely a reaction against the great importance attached to the liver [MH: and of course this part] in ancient Near Eastern divination, a reference to which appears in Ezekiel 21:26. Numerous clay models of the liver have been uncovered in Mesopotamia, some divided into fifty sections and inscribed with omens and magical formulas for the use of diviners.

I think it's really interesting. You realize what the gesture means. So here we have the priesthood being sanctified and set apart. These are the people who have access to God intimately in Israel. The high priest in particular is wearing the breastplate—the Urim and the Thummim. (And for information about the Urim and the Thummim, we're not going to have a separate episode on that. You can go to episode 72. That's when we talked about the Urim and the Thummim in Leviticus 8 and 9.) But here you have this guy. He's got the ephod and he's got the Urim and the Thummim. He's got the means of access and divination to the true God. And so what does God tell the people to do with the sacrifice, the blood of which is used to sanctify the high priest? He says, "Oh, that liver thing that everybody uses to get information from their gods, or they think they do in divination? Burn it." [laughs] "Just burn it." It's a real slap in the face of the typical method—a ubiquitous method—of divination in the ancient world (liver reading, reading entrails and stuff like that). "Just burn it. Burn that stuff on the altar." In other words, "Not only does it not do any good, but I want this gesture to be a reminder that this isn't how we give you information. I don't want you to do anything that solicits some other deity. You don't need it. Just burn it. You want to know what I think? I'll tell you. It's either going to be through the leadership

1:05:00

(the 'kingly figure' of Moses) or the priest." God gives information through both modes. These two things are supposed to be one, and they're going to be reunited anyway. But I just thought it was kind of interesting to point out that God says, "Yeah, you know that liver thing? Burn it." [laughs] "Just make it toast, because that's essentially what it is."

There are a lot of things we could talk about here and it would go on and on, but I think covering it this way (Exodus 28 and 29), the way that the priests are dressed... The takeaway here is theological messaging. It's significant because we have seen these things before, especially in the series on Hebrews when we spent four or five episodes on Melchizedek, and earlier about the priesthood of Aaron being a concession and the pattern—these two things being fused into one. Even the way the priest is dressed is consistent with the way ultimately things are going to be. It's the way they were. It's the way things are going to be: both royalty and priesthood. And it even is reflected in the corporate people of God. They are both royal and a kingdom of priests. And it matters. It's a theological component related back to the Deuteronomy 32 worldview that when you can look at the big picture, the stuff just makes sense. There's a system here. There's a worldview system. I keep using the phrase "matrix of ideas." And it's even operative within something as transparently (I guess boring) as what in the world these guys wear. So hopefully this is a good way of getting the communicative point across.

TS: And again, Mike, to get more information about what the priests wore, I think it was Naked Bible episode 72, 75, somewhere in there, first part of Leviticus.

MH: Yeah, it was 72—Leviticus 8 and 9. You can go back and listen, or you can get the transcript, too. We went on a rabbit trail on what the Urim and the Thummim were. So we don't really need to do that here, since it already exists.

TS: Yeah, it's nice now to cover so much material, you can just reference back and say, "Go listen to that." Saves us an episode. Alright, Mike, we appreciate it. Next week we're getting into 30 and 31, correct?

MH: Correct.

TS: Alright. We look forward to it.

MH: Another spine-tingling episode [laughs] about the altar of incense, blood, and all that stuff. [laughs]

TS: Yeah, well, we're starting to wind down Exodus and a lot of stuff is going to be redundant here coming up. So the end is in sight. But we're almost there, Mike.

MH: Yep. We'll make it.

TS: Almost across the finish line. Sounds good. Well, with that, Mike, I just want to thank everybody for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God Bless.