

# THE URIM AND THUMMIM



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## INTRODUCTION

There were four ways in which God communicated with man; Angels, visions, prophets, and Urim and Thummim, (1 Samuel 28:6). In Hebrews 1:1, 2 we read, “God, who at sundry times and in diverse manners spoke in time unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds.” This study will take the reader into an investigation of one of these divers manners in which Jehovah communicated with His people, the Urim and Thummim.

The mysterious words “Urim and Thummim” are introduced in the scriptures for the first time as if they needed no explanation. They are described as part of the high-priest’s apparel.<sup>1</sup> In Exodus 28:30 we read, “Thou shalt put in the breastplate of judgment the Urim and the Thummim and they shall be upon Aaron’s heart, when he goeth in unto the holy place; and Aaron shall bear the judgment of the children of Israel upon his heart before the Lord continually.” Because details for the Urim and Thummim are lacking in this account, we must assume that their meaning and use were already known to Moses. It seems clear that they were intended to be kept in the breastplate which was of cloth woven a span wide (9”), two spans long, doubled, and therefore forming a pocket in which these precious jewels could be kept. They must have been so carried and probably never were exposed to the congregation, but only by the high-priest, and by him only in the Holy of Holies.<sup>2</sup>

## ETYMOLOGY

Urim: Hebrew scholars with hardly an exception have seen the plural of *our* which means light or fire, in the word Urim. The LXX translators, however, appear to have had reasons which led them to another rendering showing that the plural form did not involve number numerical plurality and that it just meant light.<sup>3</sup> Dr. Harold Brown says that Urim is

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<sup>1</sup> John M’Clintock, *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature*, “Urim and Thummim.” (Grand Rapids, Mich.; Baker Book House, 1970), p. 67.

<sup>2</sup> A. Paul David, *Aaron’s Breastplate* (St. Louis, Mo.; Von Hoffman Press, 1960). P. 31.

<sup>3</sup> Merrill F. Unger’s *Bible Dictionary* (Chicago, ILL; Moody press, 1966). P. 1128.

the plural word “or” which is equivalent to the English word “lights.” It is the same word used in Genesis 1:3, “Let there be light.” The same word rendered in the Greek Septuagint in various passages come out as “manifestation;” “visible,” “clear,” and as “to shine, or give light.” The Vulgate renders the word variously as meaning “teaching,” “instruction by priests,” and “endowed with truth.”<sup>4</sup>

Thummim: The word Thummim is a derivative of the word *Tom* and means “perfection, completeness.”<sup>5</sup> Bellarine defines the word as “to be true.” Others believe the word to be a contraction and give it the meaning “a twin,” on the theory that the two groups of gems, six on each side of the breastplate, were what constituted the Urim and Thummim.<sup>6</sup> What has been said as to the plural of Urim applies here also. “Light and Perfection” would probably be the best English equivalent.<sup>7</sup>

The mere phrase, as such, leaves it therefore uncertain whether each word by itself denoted many things of a given thing, or whether the two taken together might refer to two distinct objects or to one and the same object. In Deuteronomy 33:8 we have them used separately as follows; “And of Levi He said, Let thy Thummim and thy Urim be with the holy one...” This is an inversion of the usual order. Urim is found alone in Numbers 27:21, “And he shall stand before Eleazar the priest who shall ask counsel for him after the judgment of Urim before the Lord: at his word shall they go out, and at his word they shall come in, both he, and all the children of Israel with him, even all the congregation.” Urim is also found alone in 1 Samuel 28:6; “And when Saul inquired of the Lord, the Lord answered him not, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets.”<sup>8</sup> Thummim never occurs by itself, unless according to Zullig we find it in Psalm 16:5; “The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup: thou maintainest my lot.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> David, p. 31

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Strong, p. 676.

<sup>7</sup> Ungers, p. 1128.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Strong, p. 676.

Others have seen in Urim and Thummim the Babylonian words *urtu* and *tamitu* meaning “command” and “oracular decision.”<sup>10</sup> As will be pointed out later, however, any connection with the Babylonian language or practices is an assumption and when closely examined, unthinkable. Some conjecture an Egyptian origin from *tme*, the Egyptian image of justice. Others make an antonym of Thummim resulting in the meaning “faultlessness.” It is generally admitted, however, that the words mean “light” and “perfection,” on the basis of which the Talmud (Yoma 73b) as well as most of the Greek MSS translate them; although Symmochus connects Urim with the word *Torahand* understands it to mean “doctrine.” The Hebrew language suggests that the two words are perhaps antonyms. There is a host of Hebrew stems based on the root-*Utm*, *U* all indicating concealing, closing up, and even darkness. This would make the words mean “illuminated” and “dar.”<sup>11</sup>

#### SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

As stated earlier we are first introduced to the Urim and Thummim in Exodus 28:30. There it is described as a part of the high-priest’s apparel, the ephod. In it were to be placed four rows of precious stones, each inscribed with the name of a tribe of Israel engraved on it. It was to be worn over the priest’s heart. Inside the breastplate, as the tables of the covenant were placed inside the ark, were to be placed the Urim and Thummim, the light, the perfection; they, too, are to be on Aaron’s heart when he goes in before the Lord; “And thou shalt put into the ark the testimony which I shall give thee.” (Exodus 25:16). For a description of the ephod see Exodus 28:15-30. It is in verse thirty they are told to put the Urim and Thummim in the breastplate to be worn by Aaron upon his heart before the Lord.<sup>12</sup>

The words “put in” of Exodus 28:30 might be replaced by “put on or upon,” according to the Septuagint; but this and all other interpretations which identify the Urim and Thummim with the precious stones of the breastplate are excluded by the context of Exodus 28:15ff and Leviticus 8:8. The objects are introduced as something at hand and well known,

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<sup>10</sup> James Orr, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Vol. 5 (Chicago, ILL: The Howard-Severance Company, 1915) p. 3041

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Strong, p. 676

not as new objects prepared for the purpose. The carrying of the Urim and Thummim belonged to the priestly stock without limitation to the high priest. In what way the Urim and Thummim were brought into connection with the ephod absolutely nothing is known. They seemed to have been used without the ephod and without priestly accessory by David (2 Samuel 2:1; 5:19, 23) and by Samuel (1 Samuel 10:20ff).

The problem is, not a word describes them. They are mentioned as things already familiar to Moses and the people. It is simply connected naturally with the function of the high-priest as mediating between Jehovah and his people. In Leviticus 8:7, 8, we read of the command of Exodus 28 fulfilled; “And he put upon him the coat, and girded him with the girdle, and clothed him with the robe, and put the ephod upon him, and he girded him with the precious girdle of the ephod, and bound it unto him therewith. And he put the breastplate upon him: also he put in the breastplate, the Urim and the Thummim.” Later we read these implements being passed on to Eleazar; “And Moses stripped Aaron of his garments, and put them upon Eleazar, his son, and Aaron died there in the top of the mount: and Moses and Eleazar came from the mount,” (Numbers 20:28). When Joshua is solemnly appointed to succeed Moses, he is bidden to stand before Eleazar the priest, “And he shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall ask counsel for him after the judgment of Urim before the Lord...,” (Numbers 27:21).<sup>13</sup>

In the blessings of Moses, they appear as the crowning glory of the tribe of Levi, the reward of the zeal which led them to close their eyes to everything but the law and the covenant. “And of Levi he said, Let thy Thummim and thy Urim be with thy holy one, whom thou didst prove at Messah, and with whom thou didst strive at the water of Meribah; who said unto his father and to his mother, I have not seen him, neither did he acknowledge his brethren, not know his own children: for they have observed thy word, and kept thy covenant,” (Deuteronomy 33:8, 9). Once and only once do we find them mentioned in the history of the Judges and the time of the kings. It says of Saul who was left to his self-chosen darkness. “The Lord answered him not, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets,” (1 Samuel 28:6).<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Strong, p. 676

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

There are only two other direct references in the scriptures that mention the Urim and Thummim. In these we find that there was no priest with Urim and Thummim. Both scriptures read exactly the same, “And the governor said unto them, that they should not eat of the most holy things, till there stood up a priest with Urim and with Thummim,” (Ezra 2:36; Nehemiah 7:65).<sup>15</sup>

#### INDIRECT SCRIPTURAL REFERENCES

As noted earlier Joshua was commanded to stand before Eleazar who was to inquire after the judgment of the Urim (Numbers 27:21). It seems that this means was also employed by Joshua in the matter of Achan, “In the morning therefore ye shall be brought according to your tribes: and it shall be, that the tribe which the Lord taketh shall come according to the families thereof; and the family which the Lord shall take shall come by households; and the household which the Lord shall take shall come man by man...he that is taken shall be burnt with fire,” (Joshua 7:14, 15). If this is true, then perhaps it was overlooked in the matter of the Gibeonites in Joshua 9:14, “And the men took of their victuals and asked not counsel at the mouth of the Lord.” Notice the use of the word counsel here and in Numbers 27:21 which connect it with the use of the Urim. Though not specifically mentioned, the same means is in all probability referred to in the accounts of the Israelites consulting Jehovah after the death of Joshua in their warfare, “Now after the death of Joshua it came to pass, that the children of Israel asked the Lord saying, Who shall go up for us against the Canaanites first, to fight against them? And the Lord said, Judah shall go up: behold I have delivered the land into his hand,” (Judges 1:1, 2), and “the children of Israel inquired of the Lord, (for the ark of the covenant of God was there in those days,) saying, Shall I yet again go out to battle against the children of Benjamin my brother, or shall I cease? And the Lord said, Go up; for tomorrow I will deliver them into thine hand,” (Judges 20:27, 28). The Danites in their migration ask counsel of a priest, perhaps in a similar manner, “And they said unto him, ask council, we pray thee, of God, that we may know whether our way which we go shall be prosperous. And the priest said unto them, Go

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

in peace: before the Lord is your way wherein ye go,” (Judges 18:5, 6).<sup>16</sup> Some believe that “the ark of God” is another name sometimes used for the ephod or Urim and Thummim:

When Saul was informed that Jonathan was missing from the camp, he said to the priest Ahija: “Bring hither the ark of God,” in order to inquire about the whereabouts of his son. The term “ark of God” or “ark of the covenant of God” (Judges 20:7, is another name for the ephod or Urim and Thummim. This is evident from 1 Kings 2:26, where it is said of Abiathar that he “bore the ark...before David”; the ark could not possibly have been “borne” by a priest.<sup>17</sup>

It should perhaps be pointed out, however, that it simply could have meant for Ahijah to get the job done of bearing the ark and that Abiathar saw to it that the ark was carried. On the other hand there seems to be some connection between the ark and the ephod in 1 Samuel 14:3, 18; “And Ahijah, the son of Ahitub, Ichbod’s brother, the son of Phinehas, the son of Eli, the Lord’s priest in Shiloh, wearing an ephod. And the people knew not that Jonathan was gone...and Saul said unto Ahiah, bring hither the ark of God. For the ark of God was at that time with the children of Israel.”<sup>18</sup>

It is possible that even the prophet Samuel was assisted by the Urim in the selection of a king, “And when Samuel had caused all the tribe of Benjamin to come near by their families, the family of Matri was taken, and Saul the son of Kish was taken: and when they sought him, he could not be found. Therefore they inquired of the Lord further, if the man should yet come thither. And the Lord answered, Behold, he hath hid himself among the stuff,” (1 Samuel 10:20-22).<sup>19</sup>

During Saul’s war with the Philistines, he inquired of God with the aid of the priest, “And Saul said, Let us go down after the Philistines by night, and spoil them until the

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<sup>16</sup> Orr, p. 3040

<sup>17</sup> George Arthur Buttrick, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Vo. 5 (Chicago, Ill.: The Howard-Severance Company, 1915, p. 3040.

<sup>18</sup> Orr, p. 3040

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.



morning light, and let us not leave a man of them. And they said, ‘Do whatsoever seemeth good unto thee.’ Then said the priest, ‘Let us draw near hither unto God.’ And Saul asked counsel of God, ‘Shall I go down after the Philistine? Wilt thou deliver them into the hand of Israel?’ But he answered him not that day.” (1 Samuel 14:36, 37). Although on two important occasions Jehovah refused to answer Saul through the Urim (1 Samuel 14:36, 37; 28:6) it appears from the Septuagint version of 1 Samuel 14:41 that he used the Urim and Thummim successfully in ascertaining the cause of the Divine displeasure.<sup>20</sup>

The accusation of Doeg and the answer of the high priest suggest that David began to inquire of Jehovah through the priesthood, even while he was an officer of Saul, “And he inquired of the Lord for him, and gave him victuals, and gave him the sword of Goliath the Philistine...and Saul said, why have ye conspired against me...then Ahimelech answered the king...Did I then begin to inquire of God for him? Be it far from me...for the servant knew nothing of all this, less or more”, (1 Samuel 22: 10, 14, 15). After the massacre of the priests at Nob, Abiathar fled to the camp of David (1 Samuel 22:20), taking with him the ephod. This apparently included the Urim and Thummim which David used frequently during his wanderings, “And it came to pass, when Abiathar the son of Ahimelech fled to David to Keilah, that he came down with the ephod in his hand...Therefore David inquired of the Lord, saying, Shall I go and smite these Philistines?, and the Lord said unto David, Go, and smite the Philistines, and save Keilah...Then David inquired of the Lord yet again. And the Lord answered him and said, Arise, go down to Keilah; for I will deliver the Philistines into thine hand...And David knew that Saul secretly practiced mischief against him; and he said to Abiathar the Priest, Bring hither the ephod. Then said David, O Lord God of Israel, thy servant hath certainly heard that Saul seeketh to come to Keilah, to destroy the city for my sake. Will the men of Keilah deliver me up into his hand? Will Saul come down, as thy servant hath heard? O Lord God of Israel, I beseech thee, tell thy servant. And the Lord said, He will come down. Then said David, Will the men of Keilah deliver me and my men into the hand of Saul? And the Lord said, They will deliver thee up.” (1 Samuel 23:6, 2-4, 9-12).<sup>21</sup> We also see this in 1 Samuel 30:7, 8; “And David said to Abiathar the priest,

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

Ahimelech's son, I pray thee, bring me hither the ephod. Abiathar brought thither the ephod to David. And David inquired at the Lord, saying, shall I pursue after this troop? Shall I overtake them? And he answered him, Pursue: for thou shalt surely overtake them and without fail recover all." The answer is, in all cases, very brief; but more in form than a simple yes or no. We also see that one question only is answered at a time.<sup>22</sup>

We also see its possible use by David after the death of Saul, "And it came to pass after this that David inquired of the Lord, saying, Shall I go up into any of the cities of Judah? And the Lord said unto him, Go up. And David said, Wither shall I go up? And he said, Unto Hebron... So David went up thither....," (2 Samuel 2: 1, 2) and "And David inquired of the Lord, saying, Shall I go up to the Philistines? Wilt thou deliver them into mine hand? And the Lord said unto David, Go up: for I will doubtless deliver the Philistines into thine hand... and when David inquired of the Lord, he said, Thou shalt not go up; but fetch a compass behind them, and come upon them over against the mulberry trees." (2 Samuel 5:23). Notice the length of this answer which is concluded in verse twenty four. Then we read, "Then there was a famine in the day of David three years, year after year and David inquired of the Lord. And the Lord answered, it is for Saul, and for his bloody house, because he slew the Gibeonites," (2 Samuel 21:1).<sup>23</sup>

#### ADDITIONAL HISTORICAL AND SCRIPTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

After the days of David, prophecy was in the ascendancy, and accordingly we find no clear record of the use of the Urim and Thummim in days of the later kings. Notice the statement from the prophet Hosea, "For the children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod, and without teraphim," (Hosea 3:4). Ezra 2:63 and Nehemiah 7:65 states that the ancestral right of certain priests to eat of the most holy things would be reserved till there

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<sup>22</sup> Strong, p. 676.

<sup>23</sup> Orr, pl. 3040.

would stand up a priest with Urim and Thummim.<sup>24</sup> This will be touched upon later in more detail under the section “Typical Significance.” Though Josephus sets the date for the obsolescence of the Urim and Thummim at 200 years before his time, in the days of John Hyrcanus (Antiquities III. 8-9) the Talmud reckons the Urim and Thummim among the things lacking in the second Temple (Sotah 9:10; Yoma 21b 21b Y ru kid 65b).<sup>25</sup>

It is clear that the Urim and Thummim did not exist after the return from the Babylonian Exile. Ben Sira, a Jewish scholar, mentioned their past experience with respect, but he clearly considered that a man versed in the law would not feel their loss. This turning away is illustrated by 1 Maccabees 4:6, where the ultimate disposal of the polluted stones of the altar was referred to a prophet yet to come. Though the Talmud has theoretical discussion about their use, there is clearly no expectation of their restoration.<sup>26</sup>

Before passing on to the theories of what the Urim and Thummim was, it deserves notice that we find the ephod connected not with the Urim, but with the Teraphim, which, in the days of Laban, if not earlier, had been conspicuous in Aramaic worship. Micah in Judges 17:5 and 18:14, 20 gets a Levite as his priest to make for him “an ephod and teraphim.” Throughout the history of the northern kingdom their presence at Dan made it a sacred place (Judges 18:30), and apparently determined Jeroboam’s choice of it as a sanctuary. When the prophet Hosea foretells of the entire sweeping-away of the system which the ten tribes had cherished, the point of extremist distribution is that “they shall be many days...with an ephod, and with teraphim, (Hosea 3:4), deprived of all counterfeit oracles, in order that they may in the end “return and seek the Lord,” It would seem natural to infer that the teraphim were unauthorized substitutes for the Urim. This inference is strengthened by the fact that the Septuagint uses here a word it uses for Urim instead of teraphim.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> H. L. Ellison, *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible Vol. 5* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing Comp., 1974) p. 851

<sup>27</sup> Strong, p. 677

## THEORIES OF INTERPRETERS

When the Jewish exiles were met on their return from Babylon by a question for which they had no data for answering, they agree to postpone the settlement of the difficulty till there should rise up “a priest with Urim and Thummim” (Ezra 2:63; Neh. 7:65). It seems that finding the answer to the inquiry as to what those Urim and Thummim were, will likely mean to wait as long for a final and satisfying answer.<sup>28</sup>

1. Both Josephus and the Talmud identify the Urim and Thummim with the stones of the breastplate. The former simply states that the stones shone whenever the *sh khinah* was present at a sacrifice or when the army proceeded to battle.<sup>29</sup> Josephus says,

For as to those stones which we told you before, the high priest bares on His shoulders, which were sardonyxes, (and I think it needless to describe their nature, they being known to everybody,) the one of them shined out when God was present at their sacrifices; I mean that which was in the nature of a button on his right shoulder, bright rays darting out thence, and being seen even by those that were most remote; which splendor yet was not before natural stone.<sup>30</sup>

In addition to the shoulder stones he includes the breastplate stone:

For God declared beforehand, by those twelve stones which the high priest bare on his breast, and which were inserted into his breastplate, when they should be victorious in battle; for so great splendor shone forth from them before the army began to march, that all the people were sensible of God’s being present for their assistance.<sup>31</sup>

He also speaks of its discontinuance; “Now this breastplate, and this, the sardonyx, left off shining two hundred years before I composed this book, God having been displeased at the transgressions of His laws.”<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Orr, p. 3040

<sup>30</sup> Flavius Josephus, *Josephus Complete Works, Antiquities* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel Publication, 1960), p. 77.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

The Talmudic explanation suggest that by the illumination of certain letters of the Ephod the Divine was revealed, and that in order to have a complete alphabet in addition to names of the tribes, the breastplate bore names of the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the words *Shibhte y Shurun*. A later scholar even suggests that the letters moved from place to place to form words. The one asking must be a man of importance and the question asked must pertain to the public welfare. The priest must face the *shkinah* (West) and one question be asked at a time.<sup>33</sup>

The view that the Urim and Thummim were identical with the twelve stones on which the names of the tribes of Israel were engraved is a favorite of Jewish and some Christian writers. Epiphanius (De XII Gemm.) states that a single diamond placed in the center of the breastplate predicted peace when it was bright, war when it was red, death when it was dusky. The problem with this theory is that Exodus 28:30 clearly distinguishes the two as different and separate.<sup>34</sup> It is really difficult to tell just how much, if anything, of a lingering tradition is reflected in the view that the Urim and Thummim and stones of the breastplate were identical. In the absence of other ancient clues, however, it is not safe to reject even the guesses of the Jews of the second or third temple in favor of our own. We do not even know the meaning of the word *hoshen*, so confidently translated “pouch” or receptacle by opponents of the older view, without any basis whatever.<sup>35</sup>

2. Philo, a contemporary with Josephus, in his *De Monarchia* seems to have in mind two small symbols representing Light & Truth embroidered on the cloth of the *hoshen* or hung around the neck of the high priest, similar to the Egyptian symbol of peace (see illustration). It had been noted during his time that a remarkable resemblance existed between the Urim and Thummim and the custom recorded of the Egyptian arch judge, who was always a priest venerable for age and who opened judicial proceedings by suspending, by a gold chain hung around his neck, an image made of a sapphire stone, which was called “truth,” and with which he touched the party who had gained the cause. These resemblances among the Egyptians were considered to have been derived by them from the Jews, in

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<sup>33</sup> Orr, p. 3041

<sup>34</sup> Strong, p. 678

<sup>35</sup> Strong, p. 678

consequence of their correspondence with them after Solomon's marriage with Pharaoh's daughter. The figure of truth ( ) which was suspended from the Egyptian priest's neck was, in fact, a representation of the goddess who was worshipped under the double character of Truth and Justice and whose name, Thmei, the Egyptian name of Truth, appears to have been the origin of the Hebrew Thummim, Egyptian authorities add that the Septuagint interpretation of the Urim and Thummim, as signifying "light and truth," presents a striking analogy to the two figures of RE, the sun, and Thmei, truth, in the breastplate worn by the Egyptians.<sup>36</sup>

This line of thinking, however, has been rejected by recent scholars.<sup>37</sup>

Some believe that instead, the Urim and Thummim were things well known to the patriarchs as divinely appointed means of inquiring of the Lord (Genesis 25:22, 23). Suited to that state of religion, and that resemblance's to them among the Egyptians were but imitations of this primeval mode of divine communication, as were the heathen auspices of similar means originally connected with the sacrifice of animals.<sup>38</sup> It must be noted that Moses is not directed to make the Urim and Thummim as is true of the breastplate. Some have suggested a supernatural origin, specially created, unlike anything on the earth. It would be profitless to discuss so arbitrary a hypothesis. This could, however, signify a pre-Mosaic existence.<sup>39</sup>

3. Another theory involves fewer assumptions. In the middle of the ephod, or within its folds, there was a stone or plate of gold on which was engraved the sacred name of Jehovah. By fixing his gaze on it or standing in his ephod before the mercy-seat he became capable of prophesying or hearing the divine voice within.<sup>40</sup>

4. Michaelis in *Law of Moses V: 52* gives his own opinion that the Urim and Thummim were three stones, on one of which was written Yes, on another No, while the

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<sup>36</sup> Strong, p. 678

<sup>37</sup> Jackson, p. 109

<sup>38</sup> Strong, pp 678, 679

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 788

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

third was left neutral or blank. These were used as lots, and the high priest decided according as the one or the other was drawn out.<sup>41</sup> The problem is lots were familiar enough among the Israelites (Numbers 26:55; Joshua 31:6ff; 1 Samuel 14:41; Proverbs 16:33), but the Urim was something solemn and peculiar. In the cases where the Urim was consulted, the answers were always more than just a negative or affirmative.<sup>42</sup>

5. Zullig (Comm. In Apoc. Exc. ii) and others have thought of the Urim as bright, cut and polished diamonds in form of dice. The Thummim are thought of as rough uncut diamonds with inscriptions of some kind engraved upon them. These were believed to be carried in the pouch of the high priest's ephod.<sup>43</sup> To get an answer the priest would throw them on a surface and then interpreted by him in accordance with a code.<sup>44</sup> This, to say the least, would be compared to fortune-telling or the reading of tea leaves. It is a theory of pure invention and highly offensive to the tons of the scripture regarding their purpose and use.<sup>45</sup>

6. The view most generally held today is that the Urim and Thummim were two sacred lots or stones, one indicating an affirmative or favorable answer, the other a negative or unfavorable answer. The chief support of this view is found in the reconstruction by Wellhausen and Driver of 1 Samuel 14:41ff on the basis of LSS: "If this fault be in me thy people Israel, give Thummim (*dos hosioteta*)." Efforts have been made to support the view that the Urim and Thummim themselves were sacred lots on the basis of analogous customs among other peoples such as the pre-Islamic Arabs and Babylonians. It must be born in mind, however, that whatever the lot theory has to recommend it, it is inconsistent not only with post-Biblical traditions, but also with the scriptures.<sup>46</sup> It is unthinkable to drive a usage in the time of David and Samuel from Babylonian practice. If any connection with Babylon is to be assumed, the analogy holds only so far as the manner in which the objects were carried-on the breast. The Babylonian objects were related to the zodiac.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Ungers, p. 1129.

<sup>42</sup> Strong, p. 677

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 678

<sup>44</sup> Jackson, p. 109

<sup>45</sup> Strong, p. 678

<sup>46</sup> Orr. p. 3041

<sup>47</sup> Jackson, p. 109

For those not inclined to give much weight to the passages connecting the Urim and Thummim with the high priest's apparel (Ex. 28:30; Lev. 8:8), there is of course no difficulty in disassociating the two, in spite of the fact that for the use of this system of divination the one thing necessary in the historical passages on which they rely seems to be the ephod. Still, if we are to think of two lots, one called and possibly marked "Urim" and the other "Thummim," it is difficult to get any meaning from the statement that Jehovah did not answer Saul on certain occasions, unless indeed we surmise for the occasion the existence of a third nameless lot (1 Sam. 14:37; 28). A more serious difficulty arises from the fact that the answers ascribed to the Urim and Thummim are not always the equivalent of "yes" or "no" (Judges 1:2; 20:18; 1 Sam. 22:10; 2 Sam. 5:23; 21:1), even if we omit from consideration the instances where an individual is apparently pointed out from all Israel (Achan, Saul and Jonathan).<sup>48</sup>

#### PROCESS OF CONSULTING THE URIM AND THUMMIM

The process of consulting the Urim and Thummim is not given in the scriptures. Jewish tradition states that first, the priest put on his robes and went into the holy place, stood before the curtain or veil, and faced the ark of the covenant. There he stood upright. Behind him stood the person for whom he inquired, in a right line with the priest, facing his back, but outside the sanctum. The priest then inquired of the Lord in a low voice, keeping his eyes upon the breastplate and receiving by Urim and Thummim the answer to his question. The inquiring was done only for the king or for him on whom the affairs of the congregation lay.<sup>49</sup>

In this tradition they believe that the answer was given by certain letters engraved on the stones in the breastplate becoming lustrous in order so as to be read by the high-priest. These explanations evidently depend upon the Talmudic theories already mentioned as to the form, and nature of the objects themselves.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Strong, p. 678

<sup>50</sup> Ibis., p. 679



## TYPICAL SIGNIFICANCE

The office of the high-priest and his dress, the tabernacle and its furniture and service, and other aspects of the Hebrew nation were all typical of the Christian dispensation in the office and person of Jesus Christ and his kingdom. In Him were fulfilled the Urim and Thummim as well as other types and foreshadowing. He was Light, Perfection, Manifestation, and Truth. He was the “true Light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world.” (John 1:9). He “came to bear witness of the truth,” (John 18:37). The Urim and Thummim were a measure of the Holy Spirit given to the high-priest. To Christ the Spirit was given without measure (John 3:34). He “put on righteousness as a breastplate.” (Isaiah 59:19). Some have seen the Urim and Thummim alluded to by John as “the white stone” in Revelation 2:17.<sup>51</sup> Surely with this point we need to keep in mind the words of Ezra and Nehemiah, “And the governor said unto them, that they should not eat of the most holy things till there stood up a priest with Urim and Thummim,” (Neh. 7:67; Ezra 2:63). Today we partake of the Lord’s Supper and the Bread of Life with Christ our high-priest. We have His word as a lamp unto our feet.

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid

# Breastplate of Stones, Shoulder Stones, Urim and Thummim

Each stone represents a tribe, each is engraved with the name of the tribe, and beside each stone is the tribal symbol applied in gold. Inscriptions are in Phoenician (Hebrew), r. to l: REUBEN • Red Jasper • an almond blossom, SIMEON • Golden Citrine (Topaz) • a sword, LEVI • Emerald • tables of law, JUDAH • Ruby • a lion, DAN • Lapis Lazuli • a serpent, NAPHTALI • Rock Crystal (Diamond) • an antelope, GAD • Golden Sapphire • tents, ASHER • Blue Sapphire • an olive tree, ISSACHAR • Amethyst • a donkey, ZEBULUN • Yellow Jasper • a ship, JOSEPH • Golden Beryl • an ox, BENJAMIN • Chrysoprase • a wolf. The shoulder ornaments are sea green beryls cut from a single stone, each engraved with six tribes. The Urim and Thummim are deep blue aquamarine and pinkish golden beryl, engraved with Aleph and Tau, the "yes" and "no" answers to prayer.

Shoulder Stones

Urim and Thummim

Ephod

And Aaron shall bear the names of the children of Israel in the breastplate of judgment upon his heart, when he goeth in unto the holy place, for a memorial before the Lord continually.—Exodus 28:29

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