

Minerals of the Breastplate: Exodus 28

One of the most mineral-rich passages in the Bible is Exodus 28 which describes a priestly garment. From the New International Version:

*"Fashion a breastpiece... Then mount four rows of precious stones on it. The first row shall be **carnelian, chrysolite and beryl**; the second row shall be **turquoise, lapis lazuli and emerald**; the third row shall be **jacinth, agate and amethyst**; the fourth row shall be **topaz, onyx and jasper**. Mount them in **gold** filigree settings."* Exodus 28:15-20



But there is a great deal of disagreement about how the passage describing the breastplate should be translated. Many words used to refer to stones refer to placenames or qualities of the stone rather than a name we can recognize. As a result, different traditions identify different types of minerals as part of the breastplate.

3.) *Bareket* ברקת

Meaning "lightning flash" or sparkly. Usually interpreted as a green beryl like **emerald** or **heliodor**, but **onyx/agate** have also been suggested.

2.) *Pit'dah* פִּטְדָה

Possibly meaning **topaz** or a mineral from the isle of Topazos (likely **peridot**). It has also been translated as **chrysolite**.

1.) *Odem* אֶדָם

Meaning "red". Probably refers to the classical red stone "sard", but has been translated as **carnelian** or **jasper**.

6.) *Yahalom* יְהָלֹם

Meaning is highly debated. Could possibly mean "honey-colored stone" or a light blue stone like **agate** or **onyx**. Some say **emerald**.

5.) *Sappir* סַפִּיר

Surprisingly does not refer to sapphire, but more likely **lapis lazuli**, a blue metamorphic stone.

4.) *Nofekh* נֹפֶךְ

Usually translated as a type of red or pink **garnet**. Has also been associated with the Egyptian word for **turquoise** or **malachite**.

9.) *Ahlamah* אַחְלָמָה

Most agree this refers to **amethyst**, the purple variety of crystalline quartz.

8.) *Ševo* שֶׁבוּ

Most agree this stone is **agate**, likely a gray variety.

7.) *Lešem* לֶשֶׁם

Probably refers to hardened tree material like **amber** or **opal**, but **jacinth**, a red type of zircon, has also been suggested.

12.) *Yāšəfēh* יָשָׁפֵה

A cognate of "**jasper**", but not identical in meaning. Most likely **ruby**, **zircon**, or **emerald**.

11.) *Šoham* שֹׁהָם

Likely refers to some green stone. Jewish tradition usually interprets this as green **beryl**, but others suggest **malachite** or **onyx**.

10.) *Taršiš* תַּרְשִׁישׁ

Referring to Tarshish, a mineral-rich place in biblical times. Most likely this refers to **topaz**, **lapis lazuli**, **jasper**, or **serpentine**.

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Information from:

***The Bible** – New International Version

Mindat.org – The world’s largest online mineral database.

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6/10/2022

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