

Exodus 28:21

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And the stones shall be with the names of the children of Israel, twelve, according to their names, like the engravings of a signet; every one with his name shall they be according to the twelve tribes.

Analysis

The stones correspond to Israel's twelve tribes by name, engraved like a signet ring. The phrase 'each according to his name' (אִשׁ אֶל־שְׁמוֹ, ish al-sh'mo) emphasizes individual identity. God doesn't blur distinctions but celebrates them while maintaining unity. Signet engraving suggests ownership and authority—these names are officially God's, authenticated by His seal. Christ knows His sheep by name (John 10:3), each permanently engraved on His priestly heart.

Historical Context

Signet engraving required skilled artisans who could carve names without cracking precious stones. The permanence of engraving (versus ink that fades) demonstrated that tribal identity before God was irrevocable—once named, always named.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. How does Christ's knowing you 'by name' differ from generic or impersonal religion?
2. What does the permanence of engraving teach about the security of your identity in Christ?

Interlinear Text

וְהָאֲבָנִים	וְהָיָה יָן	עַל	שְׁמֵם וְ	בְּנֵי	יִשְׂרָאֵל
And the stones	H1961	H5921	according to their names	of the children	of Israel
H68			H8034	H1121	H3478
לְשֹׁנֵי יְ		עַל	עֲשֵׂה הָ	שְׁמֵם וְ	
shall they be according to the twelve		H6240	H5921	according to their names	
H8147				H8034	
כְּפִתּוּחֵי יְ	חֹתָם	אֵין יֵשׁ	עַל	שְׁמֵם וְ	וְהָיָה יָן
like the engravings	of a signet	every one	H5921	according to their names	H1961
H6603	H2368	H376		H8034	
לְשֹׁנֵי יְ		עֲשֵׂה רַ	שְׁבֵט:		
shall they be according to the twelve		H6240	tribes		
H8147			H7626		

Additional Cross-References

Revelation 21:12 (References Israel): And had a wall great and high, and had twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: