

Priesthood Garments

Judeo-Christian religious garments or ritual garb exist in several iterations. Some have changed very little, some have evolved significantly and some are new in pattern and combination. Since this paper is focused primarily on original Mormon styles and their Hebrew roots, no mention will be made regarding the Catholic and Protestant configurations.

Within our focus there are five general categories or suits of religious garb. They are: 1) The Holy Garments of Aaron. 2) The Lord's Wedding Garment. 3) The Moroni Undergarment. 4) The New Melchizedek Priesthood Vestments. 5) The Endowed Mormon Burial Garb.

1) The Holy Garments of Aaron. The description of these garments and their arrangement is found in the Torah. These garments were to be worn by Aaron and his worthy male successor or Kohen when they officiated in the sanctuary tabernacle or temple ordinances. Detailed descriptions are found in the book of Exodus Chapters 28 and 39. The first item mentioned is the Ephod. This is the outer-most garment and is an apron affair that opens and ties in the back with a built-in belt similar to waist-tied cook's aprons. Attached at the top corners by and above the belt are the shoulder straps, which go up the back and over the shoulders ending at about the clavicle or collarbone of the wearer. The next items of this article of the vestment are the Shoham Stones. These are engraved with the names of Jacob's natural-born sons, six on each stone in the order of their birth and secured in a gold setting with a connecting ring on the bottom end. The Torah correctly states that the names engraved on the Shoham Stones are the natural sons of Israel not the children or tribes. These are attached on the ends of the shoulder straps in the front. The rings on the bottom edge of the Shoham Stone settings provide for the attachment of the gold rings and gold woven ropes going to the rings on the upper corners of the breastplate. Once connected, they are never undone.

The next part of this garment as described in the Torah is the Breastplate. It is made of specific material in a 2 by 1 rectangle folded in half to form a square with the two long ends brought together at the top. On the outside, front-facing surface are four rows by three columns of stones in gold settings attached and engraved with a name of one of Israel's natural sons on each stone. Securing the top corners of the folded breastplate are gold rings that attach to the gold rope chains, which are connected to the shoham stone setting rings. The breastplate served as a sling or open pocket for the Urim and Thummim when they were not in use. Two rings are then attached to the inside surface next to the bottom fold edge of the breastplate. Two other rings are attached to the top edge of the apron in the back and inside the shoulder strap attachment points so that the shoulder straps are at the top corner of the apron and then toward the center and above the belt are the rings. A turquoise woolen cord connects these rings and the rings behind the bottom fold of the breastplate. It's unclear whether this cord can be undone once tied, but the total Ephod construction suggests that only this cord can be routinely undone to facilitate getting in and out of the Ephod garment. As is suggested, the Ephod, the breastplate and all the attached items comprise one garment and once combined is never disassembled.

The next article of clothing as part of the set comprising the Holy Garments, which was worn under the Ephod was the Robe. The robe was made of turquoise or blue wool and was essentially either a poncho-like tented length of material with a neck-hole at the center fold or like a sleeveless and collarless nightshirt, which likely reached close to the floor, but short enough so the hanging adornments didn't drag on the ground, either one with a reinforced neck opening. The ornaments on the hem were supposed to ring or jingle when the High Priest walked.

Under the Robe a tunic was worn, which is also referred to as a coat. This is best understood as a standard clothing item. It was however, finely woven linen in a box-like weave and likely uncolored or naturally white. Its design was customary for the time. It could have been what later became known as a Kittel, which is a very basic coat-like

dress. A Kittel is also called a wedding garment. Under the coat were worn the breeches.

There was also a sash made of specific material, a fine linen turban or mitre or hat and a head-plate or brow piece of gold with an inscription to be worn on the front of the headdress. This outfit was to be worn only by Aaron or the Kohen chosen from Aaron's priest progeny and only when performing specific ordinances.

2) The Lord's Wedding Garment. Very little is written or known about what will be required of one to attend the Lord's wedding feast at His second coming. It is believed that when the Messiah comes in power to redeem his peoples it will be akin to the parable of a wedding party. The parable is found in the New Testament book of Mathew chapter 22. In the Hebrew culture there are such things as wedding garments. Actually, there are several items of wedding apparel. The groom wears specific items as does the bride and of course the Rabi has some traditional apparel pieces and traditionally the guests are expected to wear an outer shirt-like garment called a Kittel. In the parable Jesus tells, it is a guest who is found to be not wearing a wedding garment and is consequently expelled. This parable depicts the wedding garment as a purely tangible item of clothing, which it certainly is, but He goes on in other parables that hint at the same allusion of the coming of the Lord involving a wedding with some spiritual aspects. In the book of Luke chapter 12, Jesus talks about the attitude of what makes a faithful servant when his master returns from the wedding and in Luke chapter 14, He gives rhetorical advice on maintaining humility when one is invited to a wedding. Then there is the parable of the ten virgins in Mathew 25, which adds another dimension to the wedding metaphor. Prudent preparation would suggest that to qualify for an invitation to meet the Lord at His coming, one must meet the spiritual and apparel requirements. Just as the different members of the wedding party wear garb appropriate to their role in the affair, so should those who would have a place at the feast of the Lord. In this allusion the Lord is the groom and the bride or brides are factions of Zion and those of His church, which will be individuals from many religious sects, who have followed and lived or would have with all purpose of heart lived according to His commandments had they an opportunity in mortality. There will also be servants and guests in attendance. The servants who are the

Lord's representatives must be dressed appropriately. Aaron's priestly progeny will be attired in their priestly garments and every other servant of the Lord will need to be dressed according to their calling as well. There will be honored guests. The Father of the groom as in the first parable will call them to the feast and give them their wedding garment. They will not be the bride so they must go to their abode after the feast, but will have been blessed and gladdened by attending the happy occasion.

3) The Moroni Undergarment. Some might call this underwear the "Mormon" garments, meaning the undergarments worn by endowed members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints who are nicknamed the Mormons. Although contextually understandable it is not historically correct. The original design of what are referred to as "temple garments" was patterned after what Joseph Smith Jr. observed being worn by Moroni. There is sparse information about the original garment design, but enough to surmise how they have evolved. The reference to Moroni comes from the following statement.

"It was while they were living in Nauvoo that the Prophet came to my grandmother, who was a seamstress by trade, and told her that he seen the angel Moroni with the garments on, and asked her to assist him in cutting out the garments. They spread unbleached muslin out on the table and he told her how to cut it out. She had to cut a third pair, however, before he said it was satisfactory. She told the Prophet that there would be sufficient cloth from the knee to the ankle to make a pair of sleeves, but he told her he wanted as few seams as possible and that there would be sufficient whole cloth to cut the sleeves without piecing... The garment was to reach to the ankle and the sleeves to the wrist. The marks were always the same." (Taken from "Early Pioneer History," by Eliza M. A. Munson)

Because of this and other records it is clear that Joseph Smith was very particular and insistent that these undergarments be cut according to a specific pattern, from which there was to be no deviation. The very first garments were made from unbleached muslin, sewn with red turkey stitching and had no collar. Very early on Joseph said the stitching

was thereafter to be white and a collar was added at the suggestion of the prophet's wife Emma Smith. People being as they are, the pattern and construction changed over time and because of the skill or lack thereof and the sewing experience of the many seamstresses. Each person or family was initially responsible to make their own garments, so the pattern easily became modified. Some were made with lacy collars to be worn by women outside the neck of a blouse. Originally they were made out of one piece of material with the only exception being the sleeves. Eventually they were found in a two-piece configuration with a long sleeved shirt and long trousers. The original undergarments had certain symbolic marks sewn into them at various specific points. The marks, as far as it is known, serve as reminders only. Through the years there have been many changes made to the original design, the church leadership authorized some and those who wear this style of garment outside the church have made other changes. Some have reoriented the marks and some have made up their own marks, claiming a higher knowledge. The preponderance of evidence suggests the marks are correct in basic outline as used by the church and have never been authoritatively reconfigured.

The purpose of the garments is first of all to remind one of the endowment experience and what behavior is expected thereafter. A less obvious aspect of wearing the garment is identification of the wearer's affiliation, knowledge and resolve. There is also an element of protection due to the amount of the body covered by the proper garment design. Some juvenile-minded people believe them to be magical or ridicule them as such. The garments may enable some extra spiritual or even physical protection, but likely as a product of the wearers faith. A president of the church offered the most articulate explanation.

“I am sure one could go to extreme in worshiping the cloth of which the garment is made, but one could also go to the other extreme. Though generally I think our protection is a mental, spiritual, moral one, yet I am convinced that there could be and undoubtedly have been many cases where there has been, through faith, an actual physical protection, so we must not minimize that possibility.” The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball page 539 (5/31/1948)

4) The New Melchizedek Priesthood Vestments. Joseph Smith Jr. restored the fullness of the gospel of the Son of God and the fullness of the priesthood after the order of the Son and the endowment of the keys of knowledge. Preliminary to the endowment ceremony the Moroni undergarments are placed on the applicant as part of the temple garb with a specific ritual and these to also be worn outside the temple in daily life. There is some equivalency between the restored temple garb and the Holy Garments of Aaron. The undergarments correspond to the breeches of Aaron's clothing.

While in the temple one wears white clothing of modern design over the undergarments. These can be what the participant prefers. Some wear slacks, belt, shirt and tie. Others wear one-piece jumpsuits. On the feet are socks and shoes or moccasins. Everything is to be white. This regular clothing is equivalent to the coat of fine linen. As long as it is modest and appropriate one might wear a Kittel as the closest thing to the definition of a tunic or the ancient Hebrew coat. As one advances through the endowment ceremony pieces of additional vestment are added upon the foundational clothing in successive layers. In the end there is a robe over a shoulder and tied about the waist. This is equivalent to the turquoise or blue ceremonial robe minus the bells and balls along the bottom hem. On this robe the hem has a different significance. Over the robe is an apron tied in the back. This corresponds to the ephod with the exception of the upper items, which include the shoulder straps and breastplate containing the Urim and Thummim along with the associated connecting and ritual hardware. Over the belt of the apron is a sash, which equates directly with the outer sash of Aaron's vestments. There is a hat and of course it corresponds to the turban. There currently is no brow plate.

This full set of temple garments are to be worn only during certain ordinances. The church insists they are only worn inside one of their temples and that is currently generally true, but there are, and will be, times they must be worn elsewhere.

Women can go into a modern temple and receive the endowment ceremony. Their dress is slightly different. The hat is replaced with a veiled bonnet. When the endowment

ceremony was first given while Joseph was alive single females were not given endowments, which circumstance continued until late in the twentieth century. In Joseph's day only married women were allowed to receive an endowment only if accompanied by their husbands. At a certain point in the beginning of the original endowment ritual the husband was required to vouch for his mate, thereby taking full responsibility for her, in order for her to proceed any further in endowment.

5) The Endowed Mormon Burial Garb. In short, a deceased member of the church who has received their endowments should be buried in their temple clothes, if that is what they desire. All deaths are not the same and circumstances may dictate that the full compliment of ritual clothing items cannot be placed properly on the body. Without going into belabored detail, there are tricks of the mortician's trade that may be employed when necessary. If dressing the body, or what's left of it is not possible then the articles of clothing can be interred along with the remains. A religious burial is something of an ordinance as well. As with all ordinances there is a physical or manifested part and a spiritual part. The rituals performed during an ordinance are physical in nature and their most significant aspect is to demonstrate to the heavens through actions as well as the words spoken, the intent of those involved and a demonstration of obedience to what is required by God through deed even if one does not know why it must be done precisely the way prescribed. The spiritual aspects and occurrences are just as real and include one's attitudes, beliefs, faith and spiritual interactions with the heavens, any of which we may or may not be aware since it takes place beyond the veil of mortal consciousness. Doing what does not violate the commandments and the laws of God and those of the Holy Priesthood, which one believes to be righteous and acceptable in the sight of God with humility, sincerity, kindness and empathy, is seldom the wrong thing to do.

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