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## **Ancient Sacred Vestments: Scriptural Symbols and Meanings**

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## ANCIENT SACRED VESTMENTS: SCRIPTURAL SYMBOLS AND MEANINGS

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Donald W. Parry

**Abstract:** *In this essay Parry starts with the symbology of ritual vestments, and then discusses in detail how the ancient clothing worn in Old Testament temples are part of the rituals and religious gestures that are conducted by those who occupy the path that leads from the profane to the sacred. The profane is removed, one is ritually washed, anointed, invested with special clothing, offers sacrifices, is ordained (hands are filled), and offers incense at the altar, before entering the veil. Putting on clothes, in a Christian context, is often seen as symbol of putting on Christ, as witnessed by the apostle Paul using the word “enduo,” when talking about putting on Christ, a word mainly used in the Septuagint for donning sacred vestments (symbols also for salvation, righteousness, glory, strength and resurrection) in order to be prepared to stand before God. Parry then goes on explaining how priestly officiants wearing sacred vestments, emulated celestial persons who wear sacred vestments, making one an image of those celestial persons. He concludes with showing how the ancient garbs of the High Priest point to Christ.*

[**Editor’s Note:** Part of our book chapter reprint series, this article is reprinted here as a service to the LDS community. Original pagination and page numbers have necessarily changed, otherwise the reprint has the same content as the original.]

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When priests and high priests served in the Mosaic tabernacle or the Jerusalem temple, they wore holy vestments, which were an integral part of the temple setting.\* The priest's vestments consisted of four parts — headpiece,<sup>1</sup> sash, tunic, and linen breeches.<sup>2</sup> The high priest's vestments consisted of eight pieces — the four belonging to the priest plus an ephod (or “special apron”<sup>3</sup>), a robe of the ephod, a breastplate, and a golden plate of the headpiece (see Exodus 29:5–6). The Exodus text does not mention footwear.<sup>4</sup> The texts may suggest a possible order of putting on clothing for the priests (see Leviticus 8:13) and the high priests (see Leviticus 8:7–10).

On the Day of Atonement, which occurred once a year, the high priest dressed in white and wore the girdle, tunic, mitre, and breeches. Inasmuch as the clothing was holy (see Exodus 28:2–3), priests and high priests were vested with the sacred clothing in a sacred ceremony. In fact, if the priests failed to wear the linen breeches (and possibly other sacred vestments) while administering in the temple, they were subject to death (see Exodus 28:42–43).

The priests' sacred vestments served three distinct functions: (1) a pragmatic or practical function, such as to protect the priests from the elements and to provide a high degree of modesty (for example, Exodus 28:42 refers to breeches, which provided modesty to the wearer); (2) an aesthetic function, conveying beauty to those who were privileged to behold them in the setting of the temple precinct (for example, Exodus 28:2 refers to making holy garments “for glory and for beauty”); and (3) the vestments served a spiritual function, pointing the wearers toward divine actions and attributes through a variety of symbols.<sup>5</sup> It is upon this final point that this paper will focus. While many passages of scripture are dedicated to the priestly vestments, there is much that still remains obscure. As Durham has written, “On the one hand, they [vestments] are redundant in their specificity ... on the other hand, they do not supply enough data to give a clear idea of what is intended.”<sup>6</sup> The aim of this paper is to examine the symbols attached to the sacred vestments, to perhaps shed a little light on their spiritual intent and purpose.

## Sacred Vestments Were Attached to a Variety of Symbols

Three Biblical literary units, found mostly in Exodus and Leviticus and numbering a total of 79 verses, refer to priestly garments: (1) Exodus 28:1–43 provides general instructions regarding the vestments, emphasizing the vestments of the high priest (Exodus 28:40 and 42 refer to priests); (2) Exodus 39:1–31 sets forth the making of the vestments; and (3) Leviticus 8:5–9 presents the investiture of the high priest. Beyond the key passages of Exodus 28 and 39, sacred vestments are referred to in various scriptures: for example, a robe (see Exodus 28:4, 31, 34; 29:5; 39:22–23; Leviticus 8:7), linen clothing (see Exodus 28:6, 8, 39, 42; 39:27–29; Leviticus 16:4, 23), a girdle (see Exodus 28:4, 8, 27–28, 39; 29:5; Leviticus 8:7; 16:4), and a crown (see Exodus 29:6; 39:30; Leviticus 8:9), as well as other articles of clothing.

Each piece of clothing points to divine actions and attributes through a variety of symbols. These symbols of sacred vestments could be broadly classified into seven groups:

1. The investiture of special vestments signifies one of the gestures of approach.
2. The act of putting on sacred vestments is related to putting on Christ and His holiness.
3. Sacred vestments are associated with salvation, righteousness, glory, and strength.
4. Vestments and clothing sometimes symbolize the person who wears them.
5. When priestly officiants wore sacred vestments, they emulated celestial persons — God, angels, and redeemed souls — who wear sacred vestments.
6. Sacred vestments anticipate the resurrection, when mortals will be clothed with an immortal body.
7. Sacred vestments point to Jesus Christ and His Atonement.

These symbols will be discussed in greater detail in the following sections. When these symbols of the sacred vestments are considered together, it becomes clear that they ultimately serve to point individuals toward a path of greater understanding of and devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ.

### 1. The Investiture of Special Vestments Signifies One of the Gestures of Approach

Gestures of approach<sup>7</sup> are rituals<sup>8</sup> or religious gestures<sup>9</sup> conducted by those who occupy the path that leads from the profane to the sacred.

Those who wish to leave profane space and approach the sacred center must participate in these gestures. Inasmuch as the concepts of sacred and profane have reference to two antithetical powers — the profane contaminates, the sacred sanctifies — the two must be strictly separated,<sup>10</sup> and gestures of approach serve to separate the two. “Any attempt, outside the prescribed limits, to unite the sacred and the profane brings confusion and disaster.”<sup>11</sup>

Indeed, the entry into the sacred is potentially dangerous. Those who enter and/or serve in the sacred arena when unprepared are subject to death by the hands of man or by the power of God. For example, the laws regarding trespass into sacred space are well defined in the rabbinic literature. The Mishnah asserts that one of the thirty-six most punishable transgressions of the Torah is entering the temple while unclean (m. Ker. 1:1); also, when a ritually impure priest ministered, he was not taken to a court of law, but “young priests” took him from the courtyard and with clubs broke his head (m. Sanh. 9:6; 10:1). Likewise, if one who was not a priest served in the temple, he was killed either by strangling or by “the hands of Heaven” (m. Sanh. 9:6; 10:1; see also b. t. San. 81b). Furthermore, if a priest lacked atonement and deliberately entered the temple court, he incurred the penalty of excommunication. According to a prescription based on Leviticus 16:2, a priest who stepped across the prescribed boundaries of his zone (beyond the first 11 cubits of the entrance to the tripartite building, cf. b. t. Yoma 16b) received forty lashes; if he entered within the veil of the holy of holies, he incurred death at the hands of heaven (b. t. Menah. 27b; cf. t. Kelim 1:6), meaning no human punishment would be rendered. Foreigners who trespassed the temple precinct were also subject to death (b. t. Sanh. 83b).

The gestures of approach include the following (not necessarily in the order that they happen):

- (a) *The Removal of Profane Items.* For example, God commanded Moses to remove his shoes — “put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground” (Exodus 3:5). Joshua also had an analogous experience (see Joshua 5:15).<sup>12</sup>
- (b) *Ritual Ablutions, or Washing with Water.* This practice is referred to in a number of scriptural passages. For example, Exodus 29:4 states, “And Aaron and his sons thou shalt bring unto the tabernacle of the congregation, and shalt wash them with water” (see also Exodus 30:19–20; 40:12).

- (c) *Anointing with Olive Oil* (see Exodus 29:7; 40:13). This is a sacred rite that followed ritual ablutions but preceded the vesting rite. The locale where the anointing rite took place was significant. For priests of the Mosaic law, the anointing rite took place at the door of the temple court. Hence, the gestures involved in the anointing prepared the individual to approach the holiness located within the walls of the temple.
- (d) *Investiture of Special Vestments* (see Exodus 28; 40:13). Rather than wear commonplace clothing — the clothing of the mundane and ordinary — the priests and high priests wore vestments that were holy (see Exodus 28:2–3), or set apart from the world.
- (e) *Offering of a Variety of Sacrifices for Various Occasions*. Leviticus 1–7 outlines the different types of sacrifices appropriate to the various occasions. These included burnt offerings (Leviticus 1:3–17; 6:8–13), grain offerings (Leviticus 2:1–16), peace offerings (Leviticus 3:1–17), sin offerings (Leviticus 4:1–5:13), and trespass or guilt offerings (Leviticus 5:14–6:7).
- (f) *Filling the Hand*.<sup>13</sup> A few passages of the King James Version refer to God’s command for Moses to “consecrate” Aaron and his sons. For example, Exodus 28:41 states, “And thou [Moses] shalt ... consecrate them.” Rather than “consecrate them,” the Hebrew text literally reads, “and thou [Moses] will fill their hand” (see also Exodus 29:9, 24, 35; 32:29; Leviticus 8:33; 16:32; 1 Chr. 29:5; 2 Chr. 29:31; Ezekiel 43:26).
- (g) *Offering Incense at the Golden Altar*. The high priest burned incense on this altar twice daily, and once a year he was commanded to “make an atonement upon the horns ... with the blood of the sin offering” (Exodus 30:7–10). Located directly in front of the temple’s veil, the altar of incense specified that prayer (represented by incense) is essential before an individual can approach God in the holy of holies (Exodus 30:1–10).
- (h) *Entering the Veil*. The veil of the tabernacle or temple, which divided the holy of holies from the holy place, separated humankind from God’s presence. Artisans and craftsmen created an exceptionally beautiful veil; it was colorful — blue, purple, scarlet — and included images of cherubim (see Exodus 26:31–32). Leviticus 16 reveals instructions regarding entering the veil (see Leviticus 16:2, 12, 15, 23).

In sum, the gestures of approach prepare the individual for entrance into the holy — only after participating in these gestures of approach is the worshipper permitted to approach Deity in His state of holiness. One of the gestures — the investiture of special vestments — facilitates the transition from the earthly to the sacred.

## 2. Putting on Sacred Vestments Is Related to Putting on Christ and His Holiness

Not only do the sacred vestments help prepare the individual to approach the sacred, but the physical act of putting on sacred clothing is symbolically related to the spiritual act of putting on Christ and His holiness. This idea is underscored through translations of “put on” in both the Old and New Testament.

(a) The Hebrew *lbsh*. In the book of Leviticus, the Hebrew verb *lbsh* (“to put on”) is collocated with various articles of sacred clothing, including linen garments, linen breeches, and the linen coat or tunic. For example:

- “The priest shall put on [*lbsh*] his linen garment, and his linen breeches shall he put upon [*lbsh*] his flesh” (Leviticus 6:10).
- “He shall put on [*lbsh*] the holy linen coat, and he shall have the linen breeches upon his flesh, and shall be girded with a linen girdle, and with the linen mitre shall he be attired: these are holy garments; therefore shall he wash his flesh in water, and so put them [*lbsh*] on” (Leviticus 16:4).
- “Aaron shall come into the tabernacle of the congregation, and shall put off the linen garments, which he put on [*lbsh*] when he went into the holy place, and shall leave them there” (Leviticus 16:23).
- “And he shall wash his flesh with water in the holy place, and put on [*lbsh*] his garments” (Leviticus 16:24).
- “The priest, whom he shall anoint, and whom he shall consecrate to minister in the priest’s office in his father’s stead, shall make the atonement, and shall put on [*lbsh*] the linen clothes, even the holy garments” (Leviticus 16:32).

- “He that is the high priest among his brethren, upon whose head the anointing oil was poured, and that is consecrated to put on [*lbsh*] the garments” (Leviticus 21:10).
- The Greek *enduo*. For each of the passages of Leviticus listed above, the Greek Septuagint translates the Hebrew *lbsh* into the Greek verbal inflections of *enduo*. This same Greek verb is employed in several New Testament passages that pertain to Jesus Christ and His Atonement. Paul, for example, used *enduo* in Romans 13:14: “put ye on [*enduo*] the Lord Jesus Christ.” The apostle Paul also used “put on” in a number of other expressions:
  - (b) “For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on [*enduo*] Christ” (Galatians 3:27).
    - “Ye have put off the old man ... and have put on [*enduo*] the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him” (Colossians 3:10).
    - “Let us put on [*enduo*] the armor of light” (Romans 13:12).
    - “Put on [*enduo*] the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil” (Ephesians 6:11).
    - “And that ye put on [*enduo*] the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness” (Ephesians 4:24).

Based on scholarly conclusions,<sup>14</sup> it is evident that Paul intentionally used inflections of the verb *enduo* in the passages above to recall select Old Testament passages that deal with *putting* on sacred vestments. His usage of *enduo* is significant because he collocates *enduo* with words that pertain to Jesus Christ, baptism, and more.

### **3. Sacred Vestments Are Associated with Salvation, Righteousness, Glory, and Strength**

While putting on sacred vestments is a symbol for putting on Christ and accepting His Atonement, putting on or being clothed in the sacred vestments also carries symbolism that focuses individuals on the blessings of accepting Christ’s Atonement. In the following passages, note

how the words *salvation*, *righteousness*, *glory*, and *strength* are positioned with the words *clothed*, *linen*, and *garments*, subtly emphasizing the link between the vestments and Christ-like attributes.

- (a) *Salvation*. “He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation” (Isaiah 61:10); “I will also clothe her priests with salvation” (Psalms 132:16).
- (b) *Righteousness*. “Let thy priests be clothed with righteousness” (Psalms 132:9); “Righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins” (Isaiah 11:5); “For he put on righteousness as a breastplate” (Isaiah 59:17); “He hath covered me with the robe of righteousness” (Isaiah 61:10); “I put on righteousness, and it clothed me: my judgment was as a robe and a diadem” (Job 29:14); “The marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints” (Revelation 19:7–8).
- (c) *Glory*. “Thou shalt make holy garments for Aaron thy brother for glory and for beauty” (Exodus 28:2; see also Exodus 28:40); “I am clothed upon with glory, and I saw the face of God” (Moses 7:3); “They shall see me . . . clothed with power and great glory” (D&C 45:44); “Clothed in the brightness of his glory” (D&C 65:5).
- (d) *Strength*. “Awake, awake! Clothe yourself with strength, O Zion; clothe yourself with your beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city” (Isaiah 52:1).<sup>15</sup>

These four points — *salvation*, *righteousness*, *glory*, and *strength* — provide links between sacred clothing and the blessings of the Atonement. These four points also presented worshippers with greater spiritual understanding each time they dressed in the sacred vestments in the temple setting.

#### **4. Vestments and Clothing Symbolize the Person Who Wears Them**

A number of scriptural passages contain symbolic implications that sacred vestments actually represent the wearer of the vestments or clothing. For example, the expression “keep your garments spotless” (Alma 7:25) means to keep yourself spotless, and one who is “clothed with purity” and wears “the robe of righteousness” (2 Nephi 9:14) is one

who is both pure and righteous. The term *garments* in the following passage symbolically refers to the person who wears them: “For there can no man be saved except his garments are washed white; yea, his garments must be purified until they are cleansed from all stain, through the blood of him of whom it has been spoken by our fathers, who should come to redeem his people from their sins” (Alma 5:21). In other words, the redeemed person has to be washed, purified, and cleansed from all stain by accepting the atoning blood of Jesus Christ.

Leviticus (13:47–59; 14:54–57) deals with clothing that has become contaminated by mildew or by a skin disease or plague, specifying the priest’s diagnosis of that clothing, his pronouncement of “clean” or “unclean,” and the subsequent washing or burning of the clothing. Why pay so much attention to the contaminated clothing? Clothing is an outward symbol of the person who wears it, and a tainted garment seems to symbolize the uncleanness and defilement of that person. The Mosaic law required either the destruction of the unclean clothing or its restoration to a state of ritual purity.

Sacrificial law required priestly officiants to sprinkle the blood of certain sacrificial animals onto the temple’s altar or before the veil (see Exodus 24:6, Leviticus 4:6, 17). As the priest sprinkled the blood, it occasionally splattered onto his temple clothing. The law anticipated and provided for such splatterings with these words: “When there is sprinkled of the blood thereof upon any garment, thou shalt wash that whereon it was sprinkled in the holy place” (Leviticus 6:27). The stained garments and subsequent cleansing symbolize each of us repenting, coming unto Christ, and washing our own garments “white through the blood of the Lamb” (Alma 13:11).

The cleansing of the garments (or soul) is crucial for those who wish to be saved and to enter God’s kingdom. No unclean thing can enter God’s kingdom, and no man can be saved unless his garments are purified and cleansed from all stain (see Alma 5:21). So how does one wash his or her garments in Christ’s blood? Jesus Christ Himself provided the answer when He spoke of *faith*, *repentance*, and *faithfulness*: “And no unclean thing can enter his kingdom ... save it be those who have washed their garments in my blood, because of their faith, and the repentance of all their sins, and their faithfulness unto the end” (3 Nephi 27:19).

## 5. When Priestly Officiants Wore Sacred Vestments, They Emulated Celestial Persons Who Wear Sacred Vestments

A number of scriptural passages and secondary sources convey the concept that the resurrected Jesus Christ wears various articles of sacred vestments, such as robes, linen, girdles, or crowns, as do angels and redeemed souls. When mortals wore sacred vestments within the setting of the Lord's various temples, they were emulating the Lord, angels, and redeemed souls.

- (a) *The Lord*. When John the Revelator envisioned Jesus Christ in the setting of the temple of heaven, Jesus was clothed in sacred vestments: "I saw seven golden candlesticks; And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle" (Revelation 1:13).<sup>16</sup> In this vision, the resurrected Lord dons the vestments of a priest, with the robe and sash (see Exodus 28:4; 39:29).<sup>17</sup> Massyngberde Ford wrote, "In addition to the attributes of divinity, the one like a son of man bears signs of priesthood and royalty in his dress ([Revelation] 1:13). The garment worn by him was that of the high priest; see the description in Josephus Ant. 3:7. The golden belt or sash indicates royalty; see 1 Maccabees 10:89, 14:44."<sup>18</sup>
- (b) *Angels*. "Angels of the heavenly entourage are described in the Old Testament as clothed in linen"<sup>19</sup> (see Ezekiel 9:2–3, 11; 10:2; Dan. 10:5; 12:6–7), which is the clothing of priestly officiants. There are other scriptural accounts beyond the Old Testament that portray the Lord's angels wearing sacred vestments, including robes, linen, girdles, or crowns. For example:
- The seven angels who will come out of the temple in heaven "having the seven plagues" will be "clothed in pure and white linen, and having their breasts girded with golden girdles" (Revelation 15:6). The angels' golden girdles recall the golden girdle of Jesus Christ, as described in Revelation 1:13. Brigham Young spoke of the clothing of angels: "this company before me tonight does not begin to be adorned inside or out as they should be in order to meet with the angels in heaven who are adorned in purity, power, and glory, clothed with clean white linen."<sup>20</sup>

- Daniel saw in vision an angel whom he described as “a certain man clothed in linen, whose loins were girded with fine gold of Uphaz: His body also was like the beryl, and his face as the appearance of lightning, and his eyes as lamps of fire, and his arms and his feet like in colour to polished brass, and the voice of his words like the voice of a multitude” (Dan. 10:5–6; see also Dan. 12:6–7). Both the linen clothing and the golden girdle signify sacred vestments. As Goldingay explained, “The appearing of the man in linen (vv. 5–6) reflects that of the supernatural beings in Ezekiel 1; 9–10. Linen is the garb of a priest; here as in Ezekiel 9–10 the servants of the heavenly temple concern themselves with the affairs of its earthly equivalent.”<sup>21</sup>
  - On March 3, 1889, President Wilford Woodruff published the account of when he and Elder George A. Smith, a member of the LDS Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, were accosted by a host of evil spirits while in London, England, and three angels clothed in sacred vestments saved them. President Woodruff explained, “These powers of darkness fell upon us to destroy our lives, and both Brother Smith and myself would have been killed, apparently, had not three holy messengers come into the room and filled the room with light. They were dressed in temple clothing. They laid their hands upon our heads and we were delivered, and that power was broken.”<sup>22</sup>
  - Elder George Q. Cannon, another early LDS apostle, told of when he had a vision of the Prophet Joseph Smith some years after the prophet had been killed. In Elder Cannon’s vision, Joseph Smith was “dressed in his temple clothes.”<sup>23</sup> Many other such accounts of angels wearing sacred vestments could easily be cited here.
- (c) *Exalted Saints*. The book of Revelation provides several details regarding the apparel of those who go to heaven. For example:
- The Saints who reside in the temple in heaven are “arrayed in white robes,” for they “have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (Revelation 7:13–14); also, “he that overcometh, the same shall be

clothed in white raiment” (Revelation 3:5). In addition to being “clothed with white robes,” they have “palms in their hands” (Revelation 7:9; see also Revelation 6:11). Furthermore, the twenty-four elders John the Revelator describes as being in heaven near the throne of God are “clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold” (Revelation 4:4). Other celestial beings will also wear white linen, robes, or other sacred clothing. The Lamb’s wife (meaning the righteous of the Church) will “be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints” (Revelation 19:8). And the Lord’s heavenly armies, who will accompany Him at His Second Coming, will be “clothed in fine linen, white and clean” (Revelation 19:14).

- A passage in the Doctrine and Covenants further collocates *robes*, *palms*, and *crowns*: at the resurrection, “we shall be caught up in the cloud to meet [the Lord], that we may ever be with the Lord; that our garments may be pure, that we may be clothed upon with robes of righteousness, with palms in our hands, and crowns of glory upon our heads” (D&C 109:75–76).
- Latter-day Saint prophets and apostles have provided several accounts that pertain to the dress of celestial persons, as the following example illustrates. On May 10, 1921, while Elder David O. McKay was sailing to Apia, Samoa, he had the following experience:

[I] beheld in vision something infinitely sublime. In the distance I beheld a beautiful white city. Though far away, yet I seemed to realize that trees with luscious fruit, shrubbery with gorgeously tinted leaves, and flowers in perfect bloom abounded everywhere. The clear sky above seemed to reflect these beautiful shades of color. I then saw a great concourse of people approaching the city. Each one wore a white flowing robe, and a white headdress. Instantly my attention seemed centered upon their Leader, and though I could see only the profile of his features and body, I recognized him at once as my Savior! The tint and radiance of his countenance

were glorious to behold! There was a peace about him which seemed sublime — it was divine!

The city, I understood, was his. It was the City Eternal; and the people following him were to abide there in peace and eternal happiness.

But who were they?

As if the Savior read my thoughts, he answered by pointing to a semicircle that then appeared above them, and on which were written in gold these words: “*These Are They Who Have Overcome The World — Who Have Truly Been Born Again!*”<sup>24</sup>

Priestly officiants who wore sacred vestments did so in emulation of the Lord, angels, and exalted Saints who wear the same in the temple in heaven. In this manner, the priestly officiants served as types and shadows of heavenly beings; they wore sacred vestments in anticipation of the time when they would reside in the temple of heaven wearing similar eternal vestments.

## **6. Sacred Vestments Anticipate the Resurrection, When Mortals Will Be Clothed with an Immortal Body<sup>25</sup>**

In writing to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul used language suggesting that at the resurrection we will put on immortality, similar to putting on clothing: “For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible *shall have put on* incorruption, and this mortal *shall have put on* immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory” (1 Corinthians 15:53–54; emphasis added). The Book of Mormon also sets forth the theme of putting on incorruption: “wherefore, it must needs be an infinite atonement — save it should be an infinite atonement this corruption could not *put on* incorruption” (2 Nephi 9:7; emphasis added). Enos concluded his book by stating, “And I rejoice in the day when my mortal shall *put on* immortality” (Enos 1:27; emphasis added).

In 2 Corinthians, Paul used imagery pertaining to clothing and nakedness, as well as the architectural terms *house*, *tabernacle*, and *building* to describe the nature of mortal and immortal bodies:

For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly

desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life (2 Corinthians 5:1–4).

The mortal body, Paul wrote, is an earthly house, a tabernacle that will eventually be dissolved. By contrast, a resurrected body is a building of God, a house not made with hands that is eternal in the heavens — a house that is from heaven. He also contrasted clothed personages with those who are naked and unclothed. In Paul’s imagery, we are clothed with a body during mortality, “unclothed” of that body at death, and then clothed with a glorious body at our resurrection.

The theme of being clothed with a body at the resurrection continues throughout Latter-day Saint scriptures. A passage in the Doctrine and Covenants refers to human “bones, which were to be *clothed upon* with flesh, to come forth again in the resurrection of the dead” (D&C 138:43; emphasis added). Nephi used the word *clothed*, together with the word *robe*, in the context of the resurrection of the righteous: “The grave [will] deliver up the body of the righteous; and the spirit and the body is restored to itself again, and all men become incorruptible, and immortal, and they are living souls . . . and the righteous shall have a perfect knowledge of their enjoyment, and their righteousness, being clothed with purity, yea, even with the robe of righteousness” (2 Nephi 9:13–14). Elder Jeffrey R. Holland extended this imagery of the words *clothed* and *robe* when he wrote: “As a universal gift flowing from the atonement of Christ, the Resurrection will clothe with a permanent, perfected, restored body every spirit ever born into mortality. Furthermore, for every person who accepts the principles and ordinances of the gospel, that person’s body will be something of a robe of righteousness. Therein is the redemption of the soul, and therein is a fulness of joy throughout all eternity.”<sup>26</sup>

*Clothe* and *clothed* are also used by Latter-day Saint prophets in reference to the resurrection.<sup>27</sup> Joseph Smith declared that “we have a knowledge that those we bury here God will bring up again, clothed upon and quickened by the Spirit of the great God.”<sup>28</sup> Brigham Young declared, “The very particles that compose our bodies will be brought forth in the morning of the resurrection, and our spirits will then have tabernacles to be clothed with, as they have now, only they will be immortal tabernacles — spiritual tabernacles.”<sup>29</sup>

During a severe illness, Lorenzo Snow had a singular experience that pertains to being clothed at the resurrection, relating the following

vision: “My spirit seems to have left the world and introduced into that of [the temple of heaven]. I heard a voice calling me by name saying ‘he is worthy, he is worthy, take away his filthy garments.’ My clothes were then taken off piece by piece and a voice said ‘let him be clothed, let him be clothed.’ Immediately I found a celestial body gradually growing upon me until at length I found myself crowned with all its glory and power.”<sup>30</sup> President, Thomas S. Monson speaks of the resurrected Christ being “clothed with an immortal body of flesh and bones.”<sup>31</sup>

## 7. Sacred Vestments Point to Jesus Christ and His Atonement

In addition to pointing individuals to Christ-like attributes and blessings, ultimately, the sacred priestly vestments point directly to Jesus Christ and His Atonement. In Moses 6:63, Jesus states, “All things have their likeness, and all things are created and made to bear record of me ... all things bear record of me.” Similarly, 2 Nephi 11:4 testifies that “All things which have been given of God from the beginning of the world, unto man, are the typifying of him.” All things testify of Christ, and the sacred vestments are no exception, containing a multitude of Christ-centered types and symbols.

**The Ephod.** The ephod, or special apron, is as an example of a sacred vestment that points to Jesus Christ and His Atonement, both through its materials and its colors.

- *The Ephod’s Materials.* According to Haran, “The ephod is made of the sacred mixture — all kinds of wool with linen, *hosheb* workmanship, and hence it seems to be similar to the *paroket*-veil or the lower curtains .... The fabric contains gold, as well as woollen and linen thread. What is more, gold becomes the predominant ingredient, outstripping in quantity all the other materials woven into this fabric.”<sup>32</sup> The materials of the ephod — gold, wool, and linen — have symbolic values that point to Jesus Christ. Because of its great beauty, high value, and incorruptible quality, gold suggests eternity; Jesus Christ is an eternal being of great worth and endless significance. Wool, derived from sheep, reminds us of Christ’s role as the Lamb of God (see John 1:29; Revelation 13:8). With regard to linen, Revelation 19:8 states that the clean and white linen represents “the righteousness of the saints.” The Saints’ righteousness, of course, qualifies them to have their garments made white through Jesus’s atoning blood (see 1 Nephi 12:10).

- *The Ephod's Colors.* The high priest's ephod was an elaborate and beautiful vestment that featured scarlet and other colors. To create the ephod, craftsmen first beat "gold into thin plates" (see Exodus 39:3), then cut the gold into wires, and then worked the gold wires in with blue, purple, and scarlet thread or yarn and fine linen (see Exodus 28:6). Similarly, the breastplate and the robe's hems featured gold, blue, purple, and scarlet yarn together with fine linen (see Exodus 39:8, 24), colors that were also featured on the temple veil (see Exodus 26:31; 36:35). All four colors — gold, blue, purple, and scarlet — speak symbolically toward Jesus Christ. Like the material, the color gold signifies incorruption, glory, radiance, and brightness. Both blue<sup>33</sup> and purple seem to signify royalty or heaven. Scarlet,<sup>34</sup> which figures prominently in the Old Testament (see Exodus 26:1, 31, 36; 36:8, 35, 37; Leviticus 14:4–6, 49–52; Numbers 19:6, 18), signifies Jesus Christ's blood, a reminder of the Atonement.

**Linen Breastplate and Shoulders.** The ephod had attached to it the linen breastplate, which bore 12 precious stones and the Urim and Thummim (see Exodus 28:15–30). Two onyx stones were also fastened to the shoulders of the vestment (see Exodus 28:12).

- *The Urim and Thummim.* The Urim and Thummim (Hebrew for "lights and perfections") represented the perfect Jesus, who, as the Light of the World (see John 8:12), reveals His truths to the prophets (see Amos 3:7).
- *The Stones with Names.* "Written upon the twelve precious stones of the breastplate, and the two onyx stones, were the names of the twelve tribes of Israel, so that the high priest would 'bear their names before the Lord upon his two shoulders' (Exodus 28:12) ... By having the names of the children of Israel twice attached to the ephod, the high priest (representing Christ) symbolically carried the twelve tribes into the holy of holies and there made atonement for them."<sup>35</sup>

**The High Priest.** While clothed in the sacred vestments, the high priest himself also served as a figure of the "High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus" (Hebrews 3:1; 4:14). Paul called Jesus the "faithful high priest" (Hebrews 2:17), the "high priest of good things to come" (Hebrews 9:11), "a high priest ... a minister of the sanctuary, and of the

true tabernacle” (Hebrews 8:1–2), and “an high priest after the order of Melchisedec” (Hebrews 5:10). Consider the following parallels between the Mosaic high priest and Jesus Christ the High Priest:

- The high priest sacrificed animals to make atonement for Israel’s uncleanness, transgressions, and sins (see Leviticus 16:6, 11, 15–20); Jesus offered Himself as a sacrifice for the sins of the world (see Hebrews 7:27; Alma 34:8) though His sacrifice was “neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood” (Hebrews 9:12).
- The high priest represented Israel before God (see Leviticus 16:3, 6, 11); Christ, the faithful high priest, represents us before God (see Hebrews 7:26–27; 9:11; 1 Tim. 2:5; D&C 45:3–4).
- The high priests of the Mosaic order were required to be holy and undefiled (see Leviticus 21:1); Christ was “an high priest ... who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners” (Hebrews 7:26).
- The high priest entered into the holy of holies as part of his duties on the Day of Atonement (see Leviticus 16), but “Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us” (Hebrews 9:24).

In sum, various components of sacred vestments point to Jesus Christ and His Atonement. Examples include the ephod and its materials and colors; the linen breastplate, the Urim and Thummin, and the stones with names; and the high priest who was clothed in sacred vestments and who served as a figure of Jesus Christ.

## **Conclusion**

The scriptures disclose several symbols that are attached to the sacred vestments worn by priests and high priests in the ancient temple. Each piece of clothing used a variety of symbols to point individuals toward divine actions and attributes. When the symbols of the sacred vestments are considered as pieces of a whole, it becomes clear that they serve as a path of increased spirituality, ultimately pointing individuals toward greater understanding of and devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ.

\* Unless otherwise specified, all references refer to standard works of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, including the Authorized King James Version of the Bible with explanatory notes

and cross-references to the standard works, the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price.

### Notes

1. The headpiece (= KJV mitre) was like a “turban, bound cap”; see Exodus 28:4, footnote d.
2. The linen breeches were “undergarments of plain linen.” John I. Durham, *Exodus* (WBC 3; Waco, TX: Word Books, 1982), 385.
3. See Exodus 39:2, footnote a. Haran states that the ephod “is a sort of apron encircling the body from the loins downward.” Menahem Haran, *Temples and Temple-Service in Ancient Israel* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1985), 166. Based on his reading of Exodus 28:27 and 39:20, Haran explains that “we may assume that when the priest wishes to remove the apron from his waist, he need not lift it over his head or let it down to his feet, but can untie the ‘joining’ at his back and take off the ephod frontwards,” 167.
4. Haran, citing Exodus 3:5 and Joshua 5:15 as evidence, writes that “Shoes are not included, which serves to indicate that the priests officiated barefoot.” Haran, *Temples and Temple-Service in Ancient Israel*, 166, note 34. However, lack of mention of footwear does not constitute proof that footwear did not exist.
5. For three publications dealing with the symbolism of sacred vestments by LDS scholars, see Hugh W. Nibley, “Sacred Vestments,” In *Temple and Cosmos: Beyond this Ignorant Present*, edited by Don E. Norton (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992), 91–138; see John A. Tvedtnes, “Priestly Clothing in Bible Times,” in *Temples of the Ancient World*, edited by Donald W. Parry (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1994), 649–704; and see Stephen D. Ricks, “The Garment of Adam in Jewish, Muslim, and Christian Tradition,” in *Temples of the Ancient World*, edited by Donald W. Parry (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1994), 705–739.
6. Durham, *Exodus*, 384.
7. It is difficult to ascertain who first coined the phrase “gestures of approach,” however, it is now a common expression, used by many. See, for example, Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (trans. R. Sheed, NY: Meridian Books, 1958), 370–71, and Baruch M. Bokser, “Approaching Sacred Space,” *Harvard Theological Review* 78 no. 3–4 (1985): 279–80, 299.
8. This accords with the standard dictionary definition, which defines rite (from the Latin *ritus*) as “a formal procedure or act in a religious

- or other solemn observance.” J. A. Simpson and E. S. C. Weiner, “Rite,” *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)*, 13:990. See also James C. Livingstone, *Anatomy of the Sacred* (N.Y.: Macmillan, 1989), 98, where the author defines a religious ritual as “an agreed-on and formalized pattern of ceremonial movements and verbal expressions carried out in a sacred context.”
9. The rite of transition is common to many religions, says Raglan. “This ritual gradually dwindles, but people still mark their transition from the profane to the sacred sphere by removing their hats — or their boots.” Fitzroy R. S. Raglan, *The Temple and the House* (NY: Norton, 1964), 31.
  10. Speaking of sacred and profane space, Davies writes, “The one is potent, full of power, while the other is powerless. They cannot therefore approach one another without losing their proper nature: either the sacred will consume the profane or the profane will contaminate and enfeeble the sacred.” J. G. Davies, “Architecture,” in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, edited by Mircea Eliade. 16 vols. (NY: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1987), 1:382–392.
  11. Davies, “Architecture,” 1:385.
  12. Rabbinic literature further expounds on the idea of removing profane items before entering into sacred space; see Ex. Rab. 2:6; b. t. Yebam. 6b, 102b; m. Ber. 9:5; b. t. Ber. 61b–62b; Eccl. Rab. 4:14.
  13. For an explanation of filling the hand, see “Priests,” *LDS Bible Dictionary*, 753.
  14. See the discussion and bibliographic sources, for example, in James D. G. Dunn, *Word Biblical Commentary*. Volume 38b. Romans 9–16 (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1988), 790–94.
  15. This is my translation of Isaiah 52:1.
  16. The word “paps” is an archaism for “breasts.” The word girdle may be translated as “sash.” The New International Version renders this verse as “dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest.”
  17. Robert Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans, 1977), 58.
  18. 19 J. Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation. The Anchor Bible*, vol. 38. (NY: Doubleday, 1975), 385.
  19. Haran, *Temples and Temple-Service in Ancient Israel*, 166, 174.
  20. Wilford Woodruff, January 2, 1854, Journals and Papers, 1828–1898. Church History Library, Salt Lake City, UT.

21. John E. Goldingay, *Daniel* (WBC 30; Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1989), 290.
22. Wilford Woodruff, *The Deseret Weekly* 38 (March 23, 1889): 390.
23. George Q. Cannon, *Journal of Discourses* 22:289.
24. David O. McKay, *Cherished Experiences from the Writings of President David O. McKay*, compiled by Clare Middlemiss (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book, 1955), 102.
25. “The resurrection itself is conceived as the putting on of a new garment,” Hugh Nibley, *When the Lights Went Out* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1970), 46–47; n. 2.
26. Jeffrey R. Holland, *Christ and the New Covenant* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2006), 244.
27. See also, James E. Talmage, *Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book, 1977), 344–45.
28. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church*, (ed. B. H. Roberts.; 2d ed., 7 vols.; Salt Lake City, Utah: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1980), 5:362.
29. Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses*, 8:28; see also Joseph Smith, *History of the Church*, 5:362, and Harold B. Lee, *Deseret News*, Church News Section, 19 April 1941, 7–8.
30. Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, ed. “The Iowa Journal of Lorenzo Snow,” *BYU Studies* 24, no. 2 (Summer 1984): 235, 268. Note that the language of Lorenzo Snow’s words “take away his filthy garments” recalls Zechariah 3:4, “Take away the filthy garments from him” (see also Zechariah 3:1–5).
31. Thomas S. Monson, *Conference Report*, April 1988, 63.
32. Haran, *Temples and Temple-Service in Ancient Israel*, 167.
33. The table of the shewbread was made of shittim wood, overlaid with pure gold, and covered with a blue cloth, see Exodus 25:23–30; Leviticus 24:5–9; Numbers 4:7.
34. See Donald W. Parry and Jay A. Parry. “Almonds, Scarlet, and Angel’s Food: Things That Bear Witness of Christ.” *Symbols and Shadows: Unlocking A Deeper Understanding of the Atonement*. (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book, 2009), 130–133.
35. Joseph Fielding McConkie and Donald W. Parry, *A Guide to Scriptural Symbols* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Bookcraft, 1990), 47.

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