

The Length of Scriptural Apparel

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In matters of dress, the men and women of the world, as in other areas, maintain no consistent or deliberate order; they simply follow the trends of worldly leaders and the devil who directs them. God, however, demands a righteous standard for His saints, His *αγιοι*, in accord with His holiness. He has revealed that standard in His Word. The Christian will want to dress to please His God, so his outward apparel will reflect the desire of his heart to conform in all things to the image of the Divine Son of Man, His Savior.

The Bible teaches that nakedness is a shame (Ex 32:25), so the Christian ought to avoid it. Clothing exists to cover uncleanness and nakedness. This is even apparent etymologically; “Meiyl,” (Strong’s #4598), a word for an exterior tunic which stretches down to the ankles,¹ is derived from “maal,” (Strong’s #4603) which fundamentally signifies treachery, faithlessness, and sin;² this evil must be covered by the garment. When a sinner is justified, the divine righteousness with which he is credited is compared to a robe (Is 61:10, Rev 7:14) which covers his nakedness (Rev 3:18-19). God clearly desires His people clothed, not naked; if they are to obey His command, they must understand the Biblical definition of nakedness, for the world’s definition, complete nudity, is one of enmity with God. We see God’s definition, in relation to the length of garments, explicated in Isaiah 47:1-3:

1 Come down, and sit in the dust, O virgin daughter of Babylon, sit on the ground: there is no throne, O daughter of the Chaldeans: for thou shalt no more be called tender and delicate. 2 Take the millstones, and grind meal: uncover thy locks, make bare the leg, uncover the thigh, pass over the rivers. 3 Thy nakedness shall be uncovered, yea, thy shame shall be seen: I will take vengeance, and I will not meet thee as a man.

Contextually, God is declaring His judgment upon Babylon. That kingdom is called a “virgin” because “it had never been subdued and conquered from the first setting of it up, until it was by Cyrus...

¹ Gesenius’ *Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament*, entry for Strong’s #4598

² *Ibid.*, entry for Strong’s #4603

and also because of the beauty and glory of it: but now it is called to come down from its height and excellency....”³ The picture of nakedness is in a context of judgment upon sin, immodesty, and desecration; a contrast is made between her being “called tender and delicate” and her “nakedness” being uncovered and “shame” seen. We see furthermore that to “make bare the leg” and “uncover the thigh” is to uncover “nakedness” in God’s eyes. The word “bare” in v. 2 is the Hebrew “chasaph,” (Strong’s #02834) and it appears eleven times in the Old Testament. It signifies “to strip off the bark, as of a tree,”⁴ which is the usage in Joel 1:7, and “to draw, (as water), properly from the surface,”⁵ as appears in Isaiah 30:4 and Hagg 2:16— this definition appears subsidiary, and demonstrates the “uncovering” of the sub-surface water— and “to strip off a covering,”⁶ the most common Old Testament usage. In Isaiah 20:4 the word appears in the context of the “naked and barefoot, even with their buttocks *uncovered*, to [] shame...” Here it is clearly associated with nakedness, as it is in Jer 13:26 (“*discover* thy skirts, that thy shame may appear”); other references to its “making bare” or “uncovering” include Is 52:10, Jer 49:10, and Eze 4:7. To “make bare” the leg, then, is to uncover it, to demonstrate nakedness. The “leg” is Strong’s #07640, in Hebrew “shovel.” This is the only appearance of this noun in the Old Testament, and it is said to signify a flowing skirt or the train of a robe, apparently derived from a meaning of the verb form of the same letters which

³ *Dr. Gill’s Commentary on Isaiah*, note on chap. 47:1

⁴ *Gesenius’ Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament*, entry for Strong’s #2834

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.* This is the most common usage in the OT.

signifies to flow, often plentifully.⁷ Lifting up or uncovering a train in this fashion would, of course, expose the leg, so the rendering of the Authorized Version is correct.⁸ This phrase demonstrates the principle that we are not to adjust our garments upward, lest we be found naked, but it does not establish a particular garment length which God calls nakedness. We then see Babylon commanded to “uncover” the thigh. The word “uncover” here comes from “nalah,” Strong’s #1540. It is the same verb root, although in different forms, that is used in “uncover thy locks” (v. 2) and “thy nakedness shall be uncovered” (v. 3). Here in verse two, it is a piel imperative form; the piel is also used in Lev 18:8ff and 20:17ff for uncovering nakedness. The word appears a total of 188 times in the Bible; the most common translation is a form of “uncover” (34 times), followed by “discover” (29 times, cf. Ex 20:26, De 22:30). To uncover the thigh, then, contains an implicit nakedness, as did the previous “make bare the leg,” even apart from the connection with “nakedness” as used in verse three. The “thigh” here is “shok,” which, when dealing with people, refers to “specifically the lower leg (calf) as opposed to the thigh,”⁹ to “the leg, the part of the body, from the knee to the foot, with which one walks or runs...”¹⁰ to the leg “of man, specifically the lower leg, calf, distinguished from [the] thigh.”¹¹ The same use appears to exist in Song 5:15, where the word is translated “leg.” Indeed, Is 47:2 is the only location where this word is translated “thigh”; it appears as “leg” in Dt 28:35, Ps

⁷ *Ibid.*, #7640.

⁸ Compare *The Interlinear Bible*, Jay P. Green Sr., ed.

⁹ Online Bible Hebrew Lexicon (Brown-Driver-Briggs) for Strong’s #7785

¹⁰ *Gesenius’ Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament*, entry for Strong’s #7785

¹¹ *Gesenius-Brown Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, p. 1003

147:10, and Pr 26:7.¹² The Piel verb form indicates that the leg is completely uncovered.¹³ Thus, completely uncovering the lower leg—which is the same as uncovering any portion of the leg above the knee—is nakedness. Furthermore, Judg 15:8 contrasts the “shok,” Strong’s #7785, translated “hip” in that verse in the idiomatic expression “smote them hip and thigh,” with the “yarak,” (Strong’s #3409) which signifies the “thigh, loin, side, base...”¹⁴ the “thing, perhaps so called from softness... [from an Arabic word which means] thigh, haunch, buttocks [as distinct from] the loins...”¹⁵ This “thigh” presumably specifies the area between the “loins” (Ex 28:42) and the “leg” or “shok” beneath. It is difficult to determine the exact length downward specified by the “yarak.” Jud 3:16, 21 implies that it extends at least a cubit below the hip area. In references to inanimate objects, it refers to the entire side or flank of the altar (2 Ki 16:14, Lev 1:11, Ex 40:22, 24, Num 3:29, 35, 2Ki 16:14), to the base of the candlestick (Ex 25:31), and to the side of the tabernacle (Ex 40:22, 24). The closest specification of exact area for the “yarak” appears in Ex 28:42, where linen breeches extend over the “loins” and the “thigh” (Heb. “yarak”) to cover the priest’s nakedness. Here as well controversy reigns; Dr. Gill asserts that the breeches covered from “above the navel near the heart, and to the end of the thigh, which is the knee...”¹⁶ Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown declare the linen breeches “drawers, which encompassed

¹² *The Interlinear Bible* of Jay P. Green, Sr., also renders the word “leg” in both the column and the interlinear translation of Is 47:2.

¹³ Note the analysis of Isaiah 47:1-3 as it relates to the definition of nakedness at <http://thross7.googlepages.com/home>.

¹⁴ *Genesius-Brown Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, p. 437-8

¹⁵ *Gesenius’ Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament*, entry for Strong’s #3409

¹⁶ *Dr. Gill’s Commentary on Exodus*, 28:42

the loins, and reached half-way down the thighs.”¹⁷ One says they covered to the knee, the other only halfway down; many other commentators seemed to think it best to avoid the issue and so skipped the text in their expositions.

Other words in the Old Testament for garments provide further illumination on the Scriptural doctrine of apparel. In 1 Sam 15:27 (cf. 1 Sam 28:14), Samuel wore a “robe,” a “meel,” (Strong’s #1527), “an exterior tunic, wide and long, reaching to the ankles...” He did this since he got such a garment in his youth from his godly mother (1 Sam 2:19). God’s men wore clothing that covered their entire legs. The high priest wore such a garment (Ex 28:4, 31, 34, 29:5, 39:22-26, Lev 8:7). Jonathan wore one (1 Sam 18:4), as did the kings of God’s people, Israel (1 Sam 24:4, 11, 1 Ch 15:27; cf. Eze 26:16), and their daughters (2 Sam 13:18) – although those for women were markedly different (Dt 22:5), they were of comparable length. Ezra was covered to the ankles (Ez 9:3, 5), as was Job (Job 1:20), and even his friends (Job 2:12). This long garment is compared to justice (Job 29:14). The LORD Himself is represented as wearing one (Is 59:17), along with all He has justified (Is 61:10). When God clothed Adam and Eve, He put “coats” on them which were “a complete covering of the upper and lower parts of the body.”¹⁸ These went at least to the knees, and possibly all the way to the ground as well.¹⁹ The acceptable Old Testament practice was

¹⁷ *A Commentary*, Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown, note on Ex 28:42

¹⁸ *God’s Standard For Dress*, D. Curtis Martin, PhD, p. 5

¹⁹ see *Gesenius’ Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament*, entry for Strong’s #3801. This word often represented an inner garment; probably then it went to the knees, while one “of skin” like that for Adam and Eve, presumably an outer garment, went all the way to the ground. The word is close to the Greek χιτων, which was usually “an undergarment” (see *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, Joseph H. Thayer, entry for Strong’s #5509)

to wear garments that covered the full leg, and in no case went above the knee.

The New Testament provides further instruction and example about the appropriate length of clothing. The saints in Heaven wear “robes,” (Rev 6:11, 7:9, 13, 14), the Greek *stole*. The only other usages of this word in the New Testament appear in Mar 12:38 and Lu 20:46, where the outward righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees is referred to, thus demonstrating that outward righteousness is associated with such apparel, and in Mark 16:5, where it is angelic clothing. The word means “a loose outer garment for men which extended to the feet.”²⁰ This word specifically refers to a garment to the ground; *himation*, the generic term (Strong’s #2440), does not etymologically necessitate any particular length,²¹ but there is no Biblical example that implies anything other than a full length robe;²² while, a number of references refer to garments like the *stole* (Mt 17:2, 23:5, Mr 9:3, Rev 3:4, 5, 18, 4:4, 16:15, 19:13, 16), to provide positive evidence of their comparable length. The Lord Jesus Christ wore a garment “down to the foot” (Rev 1:13), comparable to the high priest’s garment (Ex 28:4)²³ in the Old Testament. New Testament Christians wore clothing that covered the full leg, and in no case was above the knee.

²⁰ *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, Joseph H. Thayer, entry for Strong’s #4749

²¹ *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, Joseph H. Thayer, entry for Strong’s #2440

²² The references are in Mt 5:40, 9:16, 20, 21, 11:8, 14:36, 17:2, 21:7, 8, 23:5, 24:18, 26:65, 27:31, 35, Mar 2:21, 28, 30, 6:56, 9:3, 10:50, 11:7, 8, 13:16, 15:20, 24, Lu 5:36, 6:29, 7:25, 8:27, 44, 19:35, 36, 22:36, 23:34, John 13:4, 12, 19:2, 5, 23, 24, Ac 7:58, 9:39, 12:8, 14:14, 16:22, 18:6, 22:20, 23, Heb 1:11, Jas 5:2, 1 Pe 3:3, Rev 3:4, 5, 18, 4:4, 16:15, 19:13, 16.

²³ Notes on Rev 1:13, *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament*, Cleon L. Rodgers Jr. & Cleon L. Rodgers III; Notes on Rev 1:13, *The Expositors Greek Testament*, ed. By Robertson Nicoll, vol. 5

These things are written as examples for us (1 Cor 10:6); we do well to follow them, and dress in accord with the positive Biblical examples and as our Pattern for godliness, the Lord Jesus Christ, did. Wearing clothing that exposes any area above the knee is nakedness. Since, obviously, being half a centimeter from nakedness is not modest, Christian clothing should descend significantly below the knee, and, in light of 1 Thessalonians 5:22 and Romans 14:23, the godly would not want to even be close to nakedness in their apparel. “[W]e must admit that God’s definition of nakedness goes much further than our present generation of people in America would go.”²⁴ Furthermore, the words employed for the typical garments worn by the people of God in Scripture indicated clothing that covered the entire lower leg. The Biblical pattern is wearing, at least in non-extraordinary circumstances, clothing that covers us to the ankles. Apparel that leaves us naked above the knee cannot be justified by Biblical precept or example.

²⁴ *Nakedness: God’s Standard*, Pastor Doug Hammett, p. 3

Appendix: The Clothing of Christ²⁵

[In the episode of Christ healing the woman who touched His outer garment, Mark 5:27ff + the parallel passages] we can obtain a glimpse of Christ's outward appearance and garb[.] [I]t may be well to form such accurate conception of it, as is afforded by a knowledge of the dress of the ancient Hebrews. The Rabbis laid it down as a rule, that the learned ought to be most careful in their dress. . . . [Typical garments] consisted . . . of six, or perhaps more generally, of five articles: the shoes, the head-covering, the *Tallith* or upper cloak, the girdle, the *Chaluq* or under-dress, and the *Aphquarsin* or innermost covering. . . . Three, or else four articles commonly constituted the dress of the body. First came the under-garment, commonly the *Chaluq* or the *Kittuna* (the Biblical *Ketoneth*), from which latter some have derived the word 'cotton.' The *Chaluq* might be of linen or of wool (Jer. Sanh. 20c, bottom). The sages wore it down to the feet. It was covered by the upper garment or *Tallith* to within about a handbreath (Babha B. 57b). The *Chaluq* lay close to the body, and had no other opening than that round the neck and for the arms. At the bottom it had a kind of hem. . . . Closely similar to, if not identical with, the *Chaluq*, was the ancient garment mentioned in the Old Testament as *Kethoneth*, to which the Greek 'Chiton' (χιτών) corresponds. As the garment which our Lord wore (John 19:23), and those of which He spoke to His Apostles are designated by that name, we conclude that it represents the well-known *Kethoneth* or Rabbinic *Kittuna*. This might be of almost any material, even leather, though it was generally of wool or flax. It was sleeved, close-fitting, reached to the ankles, and was fastened round the loins, or just under the breast (comp. Rev. 1:13), by a girdle. . . . We can now form an approximate ideal for the outward appearance of Jesus . . . The *Chaluq*, or more probably the *Kittuna*, which formed His inner garment, must have been close-fitting, and descended to His feet, since it was not only so worn by teachers, but was regarded as absolutely necessary for any one who would publicly read or 'Targum' the Scriptures, or exercise any function in the Synagogue.

²⁵ pgs. 426-429, Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*. Hendrickson: 1993. Footnotes in the original source have been omitted. The extract emphasizes the portion of the section that relates to the length of the Lord's clothing.

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- 32.) Very valuable use was also made of the Online Bible software program, including searches, word definitions, etc., so Strong's Concordance and various other associated programs were also utilized in this essay.