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# Clothing

The wardrobe of a person living in Bible times was fairly basic. A loincloth (maybe) was worn beneath a tunic, and there was some form of headwear. Footwear and coat were options. The slight variations in this pattern during Bible times were in colour, material, and style rather than in basic provision because clothes of this kind were best for a relatively hot climate. Paul uses the tunic, held in at the waist by a girdle, as a metaphor for the lifestyle of God's chosen people (Colossians 3:12), and everyone would have understood that he was talking about basics.

The undergarment, when worn, was either in the form of a loincloth or was a small waist slip. Peter was wearing the loincloth when he was “naked” or “stripped for work” in the family fishing boat (John 21:7). Jesus was crucified wearing only the loincloth, because the soldiers had already removed his tunic (John 19:23).

## The tunic

The tunic was the essential garment. It was made from two pieces of material, seamed so that the seam came horizontally, at waist level. When stripes were woven into the material on the loom, they fell vertically in the finished

article. In many respects the tunic was like a sack. A V-shaped opening was cut for the head, and slits were made in the two corners for the arms. A new tunic was normally sold without the V-opening so that it could be proved to be new. The material could be of wool, linen, or even cotton, according to the wealth of the wearer. Tunics made of sackcloth, or goat's hair, were very uncomfortable because they caused skin irritation. They were therefore worn in times of mourning and repentance.

Men's tunics were normally short and coloured; women's tunics were ankle-length and blue, with embroidered edges to the V-neck, which in some cases identified the village or

## Men's clothes/women's clothes

Because the tunic was so basic, it was identical for men and women, except that the man's tunic was often shorter (knee length) and the woman's was often longer (ankle length) and blue. The prohibition against exchanging clothes had its origin in the sexual stimulation that was part of Canaanite religion.

*Deuteronomy 22:5*

## Men's costume

Men's clothing.  
*Left to right:* a labourer with his tunic tucked into his girdle; a man wearing a thick woollen cloak over his tunic; a wealthy man with a colourful fringed cloak.



## Joseph's "coat of many colours"

Joseph received a tunic of many pieces. The additional pieces were probably long sleeves that were a nuisance and got in the way when work was to be done. (When women had long, wide sleeves, they tied them up behind their necks so that their arms would be free.) This indicated that Joseph was not expected to do heavy work; he was the chosen heir to rule over the family.

*Genesis 37:3*

region of the wearer. The tunic that Jesus wore must have been one of the latest in fashion because it was without the centre seam. Looms able to accommodate the full length of the tunic were invented only in his lifetime (see John 19:23).

The tunic was held to the waist by a

girdle made of leather or coarse cloth. Sometimes the girdle was slit to make a pocket for money or other personal possessions (Mark 6:8). The girdle was also handy for the insertion of weapons or tools (1 Samuel 25:13). When men needed freedom to work or for running, they lifted the hem of the tunic and tucked it into the girdle to gain greater freedom of movement. It was called "girding up the loins" (see p. 97) and the phrase became a metaphor for preparedness. Peter, for example, commends clear thinking, by advising Christians to "gird up the loins" of their minds (1 Peter 1:13, *KJV*). The women lifted the hem of their tunics too—in their case to carry things from one place to another.

Typical dress of people of Bible times: (left to right) shepherd, warrior, peasant, peasant woman, child, rich man. Note that the rich man wears more colourful clothes. The shepherd is more warmly dressed. Everyone has some form of head-covering.



At the end of the day there were no night-clothes to wear; the girdle was loosened and each person lay down in his or her tunic.

### The cloak

When people were wealthy enough to afford it, or when cold weather made it a necessity, a cloak (or mantle) was worn on top of the tunic. Cloaks were made in two forms. In the country, where warmth was important, it was made by wrapping thick woollen material around the body, seaming it at the shoulders, and providing slits for the arms to go through. For many people the cloak was their only form of protection, so even if taken in pledge for a loan it had to be returned to the owner

before nightfall for sleeping purposes (Exodus 22:26–27). For the same reason a Jewish court of law would never award a cloak.

The other form of cloak was like a loose dressing-gown with wide sleeves. When made of silk it was a luxury garment, and a wealthy person would never think of going out of doors without one. The Pharisees wore blue fringes at the bottom of their cloaks so that they could be seen to be keeping the law recorded in Numbers 15:38–39. Because this practice tended to be ostentatious it was condemned by Jesus (Matthew 23:5). It was probably this bottom part of Jesus' cloak that the woman who was healed of a haemorrhage wanted to touch (Matthew 9:20).





Leather sandals from Roman times discovered during excavations outside the ancient city of Jericho.

### Footwear

The poor often walked barefoot, but others wore simple sandals. A sole was made from a piece of cowhide to match the shape of the foot. It was attached to the foot by a long thong that passed through the sole, between the large and second toe, and was tied around the ankle (Luke 3:16). Otherwise the thong linked together loops that had been made around the sole, crossing over and over the top of the foot. Slippers were also in use.

### Hats

Most men seem to have worn a skull cap with a piece of material folded into a band around the turned-up edge, so that it gave the appearance of a turban.

The fast-flowing waters of the river Jordan. Clothes were cleaned by allowing the swift current of a stream to pass through the cloth.



## The cloak and the tunic

Read Matthew 5:40 and Luke 6:29. Jesus hadn't got it wrong, and he was not contradicting himself. In the first case Jesus was talking about the law court that could take away a person's tunic but not his cloak. In the second case, a robber would grab the outer garment first; it was valuable.

Women wore a square of material, folded to make a sunshield for the eyes and allowed to fall in folds over the neck and the shoulders to give full protection from the sun. It was held in place by a plaited cord. A light veil was sometimes worn over the head so that the woman did not show her face in a public place. Only the husband might look upon his wife's face. Hence Rebekah hid her face from Isaac before they were married (Genesis 24:65), and it was at the marriage ceremony that the veil was lifted from the bride's face and laid on the shoulder of the bridegroom, to the declaration, "the government will be upon his shoulders" (Isaiah 9:6).

### Cleaning clothes

Clothes were cleaned by allowing the swift current of a stream to pass through the coarse-woven cloth, washing the dirt out and away, or else by placing the wet clothes on flat stones and pounding out the dirt. David used the picture of washing clothes as a symbol of the action needed to cleanse away his sin (Psalm 51:2). Soap was made either from olive oil or from a vegetable alkali.

The costume of a wealthy man and his wife of Bible times. Notice his dressing-gown-like cloak with its wide sleeves, and her pendant, earrings and headband.



Right: Sculpted figure of a Roman in military officer's costume.

## Basic clothing

Clothes were not easy to come by for most people and were very costly. The poor had only the clothes they stood up in. It was therefore realistic to trade a person for a pair of shoes (Amos 2:6), and it was quite revolutionary for John the Baptist to tell people to give away spare coats (Luke 3:11). It is therefore interesting to see that in



Sculpture of the uniformed torso of a Roman soldier.



## God's armour

Paul refers to the clothing worn by a soldier. He combines Isaiah's prophecy of the armour of God (Isaiah 59:16–17) with what he knows of the Roman soldier. Underneath the soldier's armour was a foundation garment to 'hold him in' so that the armour (leather jacket and skirt, covered with metal plates) could fit on top. Roman soldiers had hob-nailed sandals

that gripped the ground well. Paul uses the description to say that the devil will not be able to bring Christians down if they are strictly honest, utterly just in their dealings, and not easily upset. Add to this a salvation that enables them to live according to God's standard, with access to and trust in what God has said, and the Christian is well-protected.

*Ephesians 6:10–17*

their codification of the law in the first century A.D., the Jews gave a list of clothes that might be rescued from a burning house on the Sabbath—interesting because the list indicates the value of clothes and mentions garments that were familiar at the time. The list is divided into two sections, for men and for women (children wore scaled-down versions of adult clothes).

Many of the names are Greek names for the garments, but the basic patterns of clothing are exactly the same. So important were clothes that it was a sign of intense grief or mourning to tear them into pieces (Job 1:20).

## Ornamentation

In addition to clothes there was heavy personal ornamentation by make-up, ornaments, and hair treatment. So important was this to the women of New Testament times that Christians were warned to ornament themselves



Left: Relief from a Greco-Roman sarcophagus showing Roman citizens in typical men's and women's costume.

## The priests' clothing

Priests wore a linen garment over the top of the tunic, perhaps to keep it clean. It was called an ephod (1 Samuel 2:18–19). The high priest wore special clothes, but they still followed the basic provision (see illustration p. 301). The tunic was blue, the ephod was richly embroidered and carried a jewel-encrusted pouch containing two lots from which the will of God might be ascertained. The cloak was white. He wore a special turban on the head (below).

*Exodus 28*



## Men's and Women's Costume

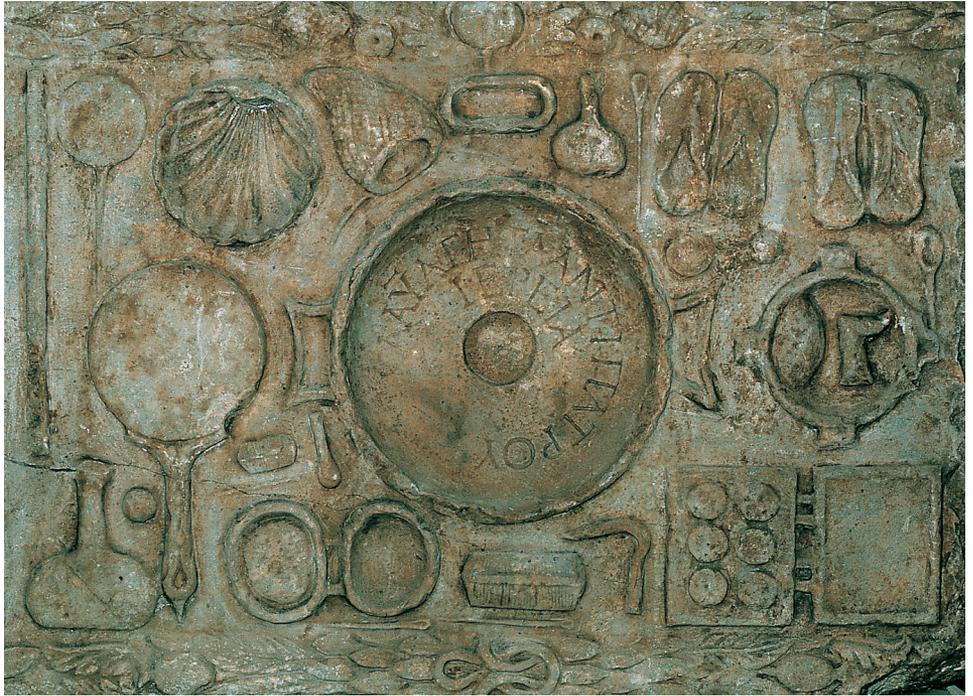
### Men

long garment	<i>haluk</i>
short garment	<i>nikli</i>
linen undergarment with	
short sleeves	<i>kolbur</i>
girdle	<i>hazor</i>
purse	<i>pundar</i>
breast scarf	<i>miktoran</i>
head scarf	<i>ma'aphoret</i>
cap	<i>pijlon</i>
hat	<i>koba</i>
scarf to go over the head	<i>sudarin</i>
breeches	<i>abrition</i>
pants	<i>subrikia</i>
stockings sandals or shoes	<i>empiljot</i>

### Women

long linen undergarment	<i>klandja</i>
short undergarment	<i>kolbur</i>
robe	<i>istomukhvia</i>
girdle	<i>pirzomath</i>
coloured girdle	<i>zonarim</i>

Roman women's cosmetics, mirrors and items of adornment are depicted on this panel dedicated by the female officials of a religious cult.



with a meek and quiet spirit (1 Peter 3:3–4). Make-up was derived either from kohl (green copper carbonate) or from galena (black lead sulphide) (Ezekiel 23:40).

Isaiah describes in great detail the ornamentation used in his day (Isaiah 3:18–21). Many of the earrings, bracelets, and pendants were set with precious stones, but it is extremely difficult to identify the exact nature of the stone from the ancient languages. Oils were used as a base for pigments that coloured fingernails and toenails. Cosmetics were applied either with the finger or with a small wooden spatula. Men frequently wore a ring on the finger or on a chain around the neck, but the importance of such rings was more for sealing purposes than for decoration. In Old Testament times the hair was an important feature; it was seldom cut.

### Covering women's heads

Respectable women went out with their heads covered and wore veils. Only prostitutes displayed their faces and showed off their hair in order to attract men. Paul therefore tells the Christians that if a woman in the church will not wear a veil then she should be shorn; but it is best that her head be covered. Even when Christians have liberty in the practice of their faith they are not to shock propriety.

*1 Corinthians 11:16*

## Women's costume

A peasant woman (foreground)—notice her simple leather sandals—and a wealthy woman. Both women have their heads covered.

