

Garments in the Book of Mormon, LeGrand Baker

The question may be asked, what garments did Jacob take off. The most likely answer is unprovable, but the circumstantial evidence to support it is pretty good. It is obvious that Jacob is giving an official speech during an important feast day, and he is therefore, dressed in all the regalia of his office. This being so, the garments he removes and shakes before the congregation must be the ceremonial garments which represent his priesthood authority and responsibility. (Some scholars believe the sacred garment of the high priest, as described in the old testament, looked the same as the sacred garment of the king.)

This is not the first time we have encountered a ceremonial garment in the Book of Mormon, neither will it be the last. A quick review here may be useful.

When Nephi killed Laban he did not just take the sword and enough of his clothing to make a good disguise, rather he "took the **garments** of Laban and put them upon mine own body; yea, even every whit; and I did gird on his armor about my loins. (1 Nephi 4:19)" Laban had been with the elders of the church, was wearing the sacred ceremonial sword, it is likely that the other cloths he was wearing had ceremonial significance also. If so, when Nephi left Laban, he had the sacred record, ceremonial sword, and kingly/priestly garment as well. So if one wishes to find the origin of the sacred garments mentioned in the Book of Mormon, this story is probably the place to look.

The significance of ceremonial garments is reinforced by the story of Captain Moroni and the title of liberty. There, the fact that they are about to be engaged in a holy war is underlined by the covenant relationship between the people, a series of new names, and the importance of the sacred garment. (Alma 46:19-24, 27)

Nephi who identifies the future Twelve in America apostles by saying, "for because of their faith in the Lamb of God their **garments** are made white in his blood; and similarly, he identifies their followers, "I looked, and beheld three generations pass away in righteousness; and their **garments** were white even like unto the Lamb of God." (1 Ne. 12:10-11)

These earthly garments are apparently a type of those garments which are worn by the righteous in all periods of our existence.

Unless I misread Alma 13, the condition of having one's garments made pure was also a condition of priesthood righteousness in the pre-earth spirit world. Again we quote Alma, "Therefore they were called after this holy order, and were sanctified, and their **garments** were washed white through the blood of the Lamb. Now they, after being sanctified by the Holy Ghost, having their **garments** made white, being pure and spotless before God, could not look upon sin save it were with abhorrence; and there were many, exceedingly great many, who were made pure and entered into the rest of the Lord their God. (Alma 13:11-12)" (I take it that the juncture between his discussing the pre-mortal world and this world in chapter 13 is verse 14 where he begins to talk about Melchizedek.)

That same idea extends to the next world as well:

So the idea is already well established that garments which are ceremonially clean are an evidence, even a necessary evidence, of the righteousness of their wearer. It is in that context that we find Jacob saying:

O, my beloved brethren, remember my words. Behold, I take off my **garments**, and I shake them before you; I pray the God of my salvation that he view me with his all-searching eye; wherefore, ye shall know at the last day, when all men shall be judged of their works, that the God of Israel did witness that I shook your iniquities from my soul, and that I stand with brightness before him, and am rid of your blood. (2 Ne. 9:44)

This concept, that the garments of a prophet could be made unpure by the wickedness of those around him is found throughout the Book of Mormon. For example we have these two statements from Jacob:

“And we did magnify our office unto the Lord, taking upon us the responsibility, answering the sins of the people upon our own heads if we did not teach them the word of God with all diligence; wherefore, by laboring with our might their blood might not come upon our **garments**; otherwise their blood would come upon our **garments**, and we would not be found spotless at the last day. (Jacob 1:19)”

“Now, my beloved brethren, I, Jacob, according to the responsibility which I am under to God, to magnify mine office with soberness, and that I might rid my **garments** of your sins, I come up into the temple this day that I might declare unto you the word of God. (Jacob 2:2)”

There is also this similar statement from King Benjamin,

“I say unto you that I have caused that ye should assemble yourselves together that I might rid my **garments** of your blood, at this period of time when I am about to go down to my grave, that I might go down in peace, and my immortal spirit may join the choirs above in singing the praises of a just God. (Mosiah 2:28)

Both Mormon and Moroni testify that the Book of Mormon is written, in part, so their garments will not be spotted by the blood of the people who live in our time. : Mormon 9:35; Ether 12:37-38)

It is easy, given those statements by American prophets, to assert that a prophet’s salvation is partly dependant upon how well he fulfills his responsibility to others. But when one reads Alma, that idea gets very uncomfortable.

I say unto you, ye will know at that day that ye cannot be saved; 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. And now I ask of you, my brethren, how will any of you feel, if ye shall stand before the bar of God, having your **garments** stained with blood and all manner of filthiness? Behold, what will these

things testify against you? ... Behold, my brethren, do ye suppose that such an one can have a place to sit down in the kingdom of God, with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob, and also all the holy prophets, whose **garments** are cleansed and are spotless, pure and white? ... Have ye walked, keeping yourselves blameless before God? Could ye say, if ye were called to die at this time, within yourselves, that ye have been sufficiently humble? That your **garments** have been cleansed and made white through the blood of Christ, who will come to redeem his people from their sins? (Alma 5:21-22, 214, 27)

And may the Lord bless you, and keep your **garments** spotless, that ye may at last be brought to sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the holy prophets who have been ever since the world began, having your **garments** spotless even as their **garments** are spotless, in the kingdom of heaven to go no more out. (Alma 7:25)

|v36 And this I know, because the Lord hath said he dwelleth not in unholy temples, but in the hearts of the righteous doth he dwell; yea, and he has also said that the righteous shall sit down in his kingdom, to go no more out; but their **garments** should be made white through the blood of the Lamb.

(BofM:Alma 34:36)

|v25 And it came to pass that Jesus blessed them as they did pray unto him; and his countenance did smile upon them, and the light of his countenance did shine upon them, and behold they were as white as the countenance and also the **garments** of Jesus; and behold the whiteness thereof did exceed all the whiteness, yea, even there could be nothing upon earth so white as the whiteness thereof.

(BofM:3 Nephi 19:25)

|v19 And no unclean thing can enter into his kingdom; therefore nothing entereth into his rest 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.

(BofM:3 Nephi 27:19)

|v10 And then cometh the New Jerusalem; and blessed are they who dwell therein, for it is they whose **garments** are white through the blood of the Lamb; and they are they who are numbered among the remnant of the seed of Joseph, who were of the house of Israel.

(BofM:Ether 13:10)

Given that description of the righteous, this quote from Isaiah is perfectly at home in Jacob's writings, as well as in the instructions from the Saviour: "Awake, awake, put on thy strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful **garments**, O Jerusalem, the holy city; for henceforth there shall no more come into thee the uncircumcised and the unclean. (2 Ne. 8:24 ; 3 Nephi 20:36)

|v31 And awake, and arise from the dust, O Jerusalem; yea, and put on thy beautiful **garments**, O daughter of Zion; and strengthen thy stakes and enlarge thy borders forever, that thou mayest no more be confounded, that the covenants of the Eternal Father which he hath made unto thee, O house of Israel, may be fulfilled.

(BofM:Moroni 10:31)