

## LIFE OUTSIDE THE HOME

### How They Dressed

As we move into spring and summer, our wardrobes change with the seasons. We put away the long-sleeved shirts and sweaters and take out the lighter clothing. Styles change in America too. Things that were worn twenty years ago are not as commonly seen today.

It was different in Bible times. In those days, the same type of clothing was worn year round. Styles also did not change. Even now, two thousand years after Jesus, the clothing worn in Palestine today is similar to that worn in days of old.

### The Basic Garments

**Tunic** The tunic was the basic undergarment. In some Bible translations it is called the "shirt." It was generally made of animal hide or wool. (Modern tunics are made of cotton.) It is a sleeveless that looked something like a sack with a v-neck and slits for the arms. It reached to the knees or ankles. Women and men both wore tunics, although the women's tunics were often a little more decorative and a little longer. Occasionally, when the weather was very hot, this would be the only piece of clothing worn. This was not common, however, because to be clad only in one's tunic was considered naked.

Wealthy individuals would have sleeves on their tunics as well. Joseph's "coat" of many colors was most likely a sleeved tunic. Those who had more money would have more than one tunic also. Only the poor did not own two tunics.

Consider these Bible verses that focus on the tunic:

Gen 37:3  
 John 19:23  
 Matthew 10:9-10

**Outer Tunic** There was also a looser, longer kind of tunic sometimes used by the very wealthy or persons of great importance. This was the outer tunic. It could be worn over a regular tunic or in place of the regular tunic

### Belt

In order to move around and work freely in a tunic, it was necessary to belt it at the waist. A belt (or *girdle*) was usually made of leather and about six inches wide. It would tie the tunic at the waist. "To be girded" means to be "belted up" and "ready for action." Jesus used this illustration in Luke 12:35. See also Psalm 18:39. The belt would often hold tools or weapons as well.



How is this language used in Ephesians 6:14 as relating to the Christian's warfare with Satan?

### Coat

The coat, sometimes called the *mantle* was worn over the tunic and belt. This would typically be made of wool or goat's hair. The colors could include red (for the military), blue (a common color), or shades of brown and white.

The coat was a person's defense against the weather (cold and heat). The law did not allow anyone even to give up their coats as security for a loan (Ex 22:26-27) because it was such an important piece of clothing. At first, the order of events in Matthew 5:40 might seem strange to us, but in light of this information, it becomes clear.

Finally, the coat became a carrying bag as well. Pockets would be able to hold grain and other items. The Palestinian cloaks were the original "cargo pants!" Ruth was able to put six measures of barley into her cloak (Ruth 3:15).

### Head Covering

Since the rays of the sun can be dangerous, the people of Bible times almost always wore head covering. The men would wear a turban. The women would also wear something on their heads, usually with a veil attached. Sometimes the veils are made of heavy white linen with embroidery. When in public, it was customary for the women to wear the veil nearly all the time. (To be unveiled

was to dress like the prostitutes did.)

## Shoes

The shoes they wore were what we might think of as sandals. The sole would be made of wood or leather and then leather thongs would fasten the whole thing together. Sandals are mentioned frequently in the Bible, perhaps the most famous reference being Mark 1:7.



## The Greatest Garment

The most important clothing, of course, is not the clothing for our bodies, but the clothing for our souls. By nature each of us is sinful and unable to keep the Law of God to perfection. But Christ our Savior *did* keep the Law perfectly and *credited it to us*. He, in effect, took His own righteousness and put it on us—*clothing us* with Himself: All those who come to faith have “put on Christ.” It is the greatest clothing of all. It is the clothing that assures us of eternal life in heaven.



“Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness  
My beauty are, my glorious dress.”



## Resources

- ! *Manners and Customs of Bible Lands* by Fred H. Wight
- ! *Bible Times and Customs* by Tim Gibson
- ! [www.biblepicturegallery.com](http://www.biblepicturegallery.com)

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