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**Abstract** The publication of the Book of Mormon brought forward the first of many comparisons between the restorational work of the Prophet Joseph Smith and his surrounding environment, including Freemasonry. One point of comparison has been the lambskin apparel mentioned in 3 Nephi 4:7. A possible connection exists between this item of apparel and ritual clothing that was worn in ancient Israel, Egypt, and Mesoamerica. I suggest a possible reason for the use of this item of clothing among the secret combinations in the Book of Mormon and discuss the lambskin apron used in Freemasonic ritual.

## Girded about with a Lambskin

Matthew B. Brown

**Abstract:** The publication of the Book of Mormon brought forward the first of many comparisons between the restorational work of the Prophet Joseph Smith and his surrounding environment, including Freemasonry. One point of comparison has been the lambskin apparel mentioned in 3 Nephi 4:7. I will suggest a possible connection between this item of apparel and ritual clothing that was worn in ancient Israel, Egypt, and Mesoamerica. I will also suggest a possible reason for the use of this item of clothing among the secret combinations in the Book of Mormon. Finally, I will discuss the lambskin apron used in Freemasonic ritual.

### Introduction

It has become fashionable in recent years for certain members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to agree with viewpoints that have long been held by anti-Mormon critics.<sup>1</sup> According to one of these viewpoints, Joseph Smith plagiarized ritual elements from a fraternal organization known as the Freemasons and incorporated them into Latter-day Saint scripture and theology with the false claim that they were divinely restored.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For an insightful look at this phenomenon, see Daniel C. Peterson, "Questions to Legal Answers," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 4 (1992): vii-lxxvi.

<sup>2</sup> For a general overview of Joseph Smith's dealings with Freemasonry, see Kenneth W. Godfrey, "Freemasonry in Nauvoo," and "Freemasonry and the Temple," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 2:527-29.

Adherents to this *environmental theory* also charge that the Book of Mormon storyline about the Gadianton robbers is a description of nineteenth-century Freemasons. Those who take this position are either unaware that this charge has received detailed rebuttal or unwilling to acknowledge their proposition's weakness.<sup>3</sup>

In this paper I will attempt to demonstrate that the lambskin apparel of 3 Nephi 4:7, which has been mentioned as one of the borrowed Masonic elements,<sup>4</sup> can indeed be seen from an ancient perspective. My approach will be threefold. First, the literary qualities of 3 Nephi 4:7 will be examined, and the connection of this verse to other Book of Mormon passages will be explored. Second, several parallel texts and practices from the Bible, Egypt, and Mesoamerica will be investigated because of their possible relevance to the passage in question. And third, I will present some of the writings of prominent Masonic scholars which deal with the historical origin of their lambskin apron.

### The Lambskin of 3 Nephi 4:7

It will be helpful to begin by presenting some relevant background material for this study. The members of Lehi's family were "descendants of Joseph" (1 Nephi 5:14; 6:2), specifically through the branch of Manasseh (see Alma 10:3).<sup>5</sup> But unlike the

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<sup>3</sup> Daniel C. Peterson, "Notes on Gadianton Masonry," in *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and William J. Hamblin (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990), 174–224; see 203–4 and 422 n. 9, where the issue of the lambskin is briefly dealt with. See also Peterson's follow-up article, "'Secret Combinations' Revisited," in *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 1/1 (1992): 184–88. For a look at the latest research on the antiquity of the Book of Mormon, see, for example, Noel B. Reynolds, ed., *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: The Evidence for Ancient Origins* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1997).

<sup>4</sup> For a general overview of Freemasonry, see William H. Stemper Jr., "Freemasons," in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 5:416–18.

<sup>5</sup> Erastus Snow reported that the Prophet Joseph Smith learned from the lost 116 pages of the Book of Mormon that Ishmael's family, who had joined the Lehite colony in Jerusalem, also came from the tribe of Joseph through the branch of Ephraim. *JD*, 23:184–85. If accurate, it means that the Nephites were from the birthright tribe of Joseph. Some scholars believe that one symbol of the birthright was Joseph's "coat." William Wilson, *Old Testament Word Studies*



majority of the house of Israel, these members of the birthright tribe exercised the Melchizedek Priesthood.<sup>6</sup> We know that Lehi's colony originated from Jerusalem, the site of Israel's national temple, and when they arrived in the New World they built several temples, the first of which was patterned after King Solomon's. We also know that the Lehite colony practiced temple rituals in strict accordance with Israelite law.<sup>7</sup> At the present time we do not possess a detailed account of Nephite temple activities. It was the belief of one modern apostle that the reason for this is that the majority of that information may be contained in the sealed portion of the golden plates,<sup>8</sup> though many temple concepts can still be seen scattered throughout the present text.<sup>9</sup> In consequence of

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(Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1978), 82. In ancient Jewish legends this was not a coat "of many colors" but rather the royal and priestly "coat of skins" made by God for Adam which had been passed down through the ages by the patriarchs. Hugh W. Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 3rd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988), 218–21; Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1937), 2:139; 5:326 n. 11; 5:329 n. 43. One writer even suggests that "coat of many colors" can be translated as "seamless coat," which points to a christological parallel (see John 19:23) as well as to the high priest's seamless temple robe mentioned in Exodus 28:31–32. Thomas K. Cheyne, *Encyclopaedia Biblica* (New York: Macmillan, 1899–1903), 5222 n. 1.

<sup>6</sup> John W. Welch, "The Melchizedek Material in Alma 13:13–19," in *By Study and Also by Faith: Essays in Honor of Hugh W. Nibley*, ed. John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990), 2:238–72; Daniel C. Peterson, "Priesthood in Mosiah," in *The Book of Mormon: Mosiah, Salvation Only through Christ*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1991), 187–210; Rodney Turner, "The Three Nephite Churches of Christ," in *The Book of Mormon: The Keystone Scripture*, ed. Paul R. Cheesman (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1988), 100–126.

<sup>7</sup> John W. Welch, "The Temple in the Book of Mormon: The Temples at the Cities of Nephi, Zarahemla, and Bountiful," in *Temples of the Ancient World: Ritual and Symbolism*, ed. Donald W. Parry (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1994), 297–387.

<sup>8</sup> Bruce R. McConkie, "The Bible, a Sealed Book," as quoted in Rex C. Reeve Jr., "The Book of Mormon Plates," in *The Book of Mormon: First Nephi, The Doctrinal Foundation*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1988), 110.

<sup>9</sup> See Robert L. Millet, "The Holy Order of God," in *The Power of the Word: Saving Doctrines from the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994), 130–53; John W. Welch, *The Sermon at the Temple and the*

the Book of Mormon's present format we also do not find within its pages a detailed description of the ritual clothing worn by the Nephite temple priests during their ministrations. But because they were orthodox Israelites, it is probably safe to assume that the Nephites wore the very same ritual attire that is divinely prescribed in Exodus 28. They would have known about this ritual clothing both from personal observation in Jerusalem and from the text of Exodus that was inscribed on the brass plates. The relevance of this background material will become more apparent in the discussion that follows.

Now we come to the text of 3 Nephi 4:7 itself. It has been amply demonstrated that the Book of Mormon is filled with ancient literary patterns, and it so happens that the passage under discussion contains several of them. The first is a type of parallelism known as *polysyndeton*, a Greek word meaning "many bound together." This type of parallelism utilizes a form called *many ands*, which is designed to bind the passage together in a unified idea or central thought.<sup>10</sup> This passage also contains an ancient literary form called *chiasmus* as well as an intricate interlocking of parallel words and ideas. As can be seen below, the subject found near the center of this complex passage is the "lamb-skin" apparel that was worn by the Gadianton robbers.

And it came to pass

2 that they did come up to battle;

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*Sermon on the Mount: A Latter-day Saint Approach* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990); M. Catherine Thomas, "The Brother of Jared at the Veil," in *Temples of the Ancient World*, 388–98. Joseph Smith and his associates referred to the Nauvoo temple ordinances as the "holy order" and some critics have claimed that the Prophet plagiarized this phrase from Freemasonry. But an examination of Hebrews 6:20 and 7:1–28 reveals that the concept is much older than Freemasonry's acquisition of the term. In addition, Exodus 34:1–2 JST and Alma 4:20; 13:1, 6–11, verify that Joseph Smith was familiar with this term and its relationship to sacred ordinances in the early 1830s, long before his formal association with Freemasonry during the Nauvoo period.

<sup>10</sup> Donald W. Parry, *The Book of Mormon Text Reformatted according to Parallelistic Patterns* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1992), xxxviii–xxxix, 383–84. There is one *and* at the end of the passage that was not separated in Parry's text but has been for this article. My thanks to John A. Tvedtnes for bringing this to my attention. In this study I have offered my own reformatted text based on Parry's text and the one found in Gorton, *A New Witness for Christ*, 430.



- 1 and it was in the sixth month;  
 1 and behold, great and terrible was the day  
 2 that they did come up to battle;  
 and they were girded about after the manner of robbers;  
and they had a lamb-skin about their loins,  
 3 and they were dyed in blood,  
and their heads were shorn,  
 2 and they had headplates upon them;  
 1 and great and terrible was the appearance of the  
 armies of Giddianhi,  
 2 because of their armor,  
 3 and because of their being dyed in blood.

But this is not the only indication that the lambskin apparel was meant to be noticed by readers of the Book of Mormon because an even larger pattern of parallelism can be found in material from the books of Enos and Mosiah. Ancient writers used repetition to teach and reinforce a particular concept.<sup>11</sup> The scriptures below should suffice to demonstrate that the "leather girdle" theme was neither isolated nor obscure but was part of a much larger design or pattern.

### Enos 1:20; Mosiah 10:8; 3 Nephi 4:7

- (Enos 1:14, 20) Lamanites hate and continually seek to destroy the Nephites  
 (Mosiah 10:17) Lamanites hate, rob, plunder, and murder the Nephites  
 (3 Nephi 4:5) Gadianon robbers "plunder and rob and murder" the Nephites
- (Enos 1:20) Lamanites "became wild, and ferocious, and a blood-thirsty people"  
 (Mosiah 10:12) Lamanites "were a wild, and ferocious, and a blood-thirsty people"

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<sup>11</sup> Richard D. Rust, "Recurrence in Book of Mormon Narratives," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 3/1 (1994): 39-52; Alan Goff, "Boats, Beginnings, and Repetitions," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 1/1 (1992): 67-84; Donald W. Parry, "Power through Repetition: The Dynamics of Book of Mormon Parallelism," in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited*, 295-309.

- (Enos 1:20) Lamanites use the bow, cimeter, and ax  
(Mosiah 10:8) Lamanites use bows, arrows, swords, cimeters, stones, and slings
- (Enos 1:20) Lamanites had “their heads shaven”  
(Mosiah 10:8) Lamanites had “their heads shaved”  
(3 Nephi 4:7) Gadianton robbers’ “heads were shorn”
- (Enos 1:20) Lamanites wear “a short skin girdle about their loins”  
(Mosiah 10:8) Lamanites “were girded with a leathern girdle about their loins”  
(3 Nephi 4:7) Gadianton robbers were “girded about after the manner of robbers; and they had a lamb-skin about their loins”
- (Enos 1:21) Nephites “raise all manner of grain, and of fruit, and flocks,” cattle, and horses  
(Mosiah 10:4) Nephites “raise all manner of grain and all manner of fruit”  
(3 Nephi 4:3, 4, 6) Nephites “raise grain” and reserved provisions, which included flocks, cattle, and horses
- (Mosiah 9:16; 10:1) Nephites prepare “weapons of war made of every kind”  
(3 Nephi 3:26) Nephites “make weapons of war of every kind”
- (Mosiah 9:17; 10:10) Nephites go to battle against the Lamanites “in the strength of the Lord”  
(3 Nephi 4:10) Nephites go to battle against the Gadianton robbers “in the strength of the Lord”
- (Mosiah 9:17) Nephites “did cry mightily to the Lord that he would deliver us out of the hands of our enemies”  
(3 Nephi 4:8) Nephites “did lift their cries to the Lord their God, that he would spare them, and deliver them out of the hands of their enemies”

From these parallel passages it is possible to learn something about the identity, appearance, and function of the object in question.



1. It was called a "girdle."
2. It was made of leather; in at least one instance it was made of lambskin.
3. It became distinctive attire among the secret combinations.
4. It covered the loin area of the body.
5. It was short in length.

It would appear that this is the description of something more substantial than just a belt or sash. Could it be possible that this item of clothing was a lambskin apron? It is fairly common for Bible commentators to note that in the Old Testament the Hebrew word translated as "apron" (*ḥagorah*) is sometimes also translated as "girdle," and that the two words can be used interchangeably.<sup>12</sup> Likewise, in the New Testament the Greek word that is translated as "apron" (*simikinthion*) literally means "half-girdle."<sup>13</sup> From a more technical perspective Foote reminds us that an apron is not, strictly speaking, a garment that is worn, but is rather an object that is girded about or hung upon the person by the "girdle" or belt that is attached to it. He also notes that the original meaning of the Hebrew word *ḥagorah*, like the Arabic *ḥajara*, is to "surround, enclose," which in turn corresponds to *ḥiggūr*, "enclosure, lap." Hence, in Genesis 3:7 the aprons worn by Adam and Eve were girded about their waists so as to enclose and cover the area of their lap or loins.<sup>14</sup> English dictionaries from the time when the Book of Mormon was being translated

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<sup>12</sup> Carol Meyers, "Apron," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1:318–19; N. B. Baker, "Apron," in *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, ed. Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 1:230; J. M. Myers, "Apron," in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. George A. Buttrick (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), 1:176; James Strong, *The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville: Nelson, 1990), 37, Hebrew and Chaldee Dictionary, #2290 — *chagorah* (from #2296), "a belt (for the waist): — apron, armour, gird(-le)"; #2296 — *chagar*, "a prim. root; to gird on (as a belt, armour, etc.)."

<sup>13</sup> William Cruickshank, "Apron," in *Dictionary of the Apostolic Church*, ed. James Hastings (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1916), 1:87; John W. DeHoog, "Apron," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. G. W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 1:217.

<sup>14</sup> Theodore C. Foote, "The Ephod," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 21 (1902): 12–13.

indicate that the words "girdle" and "apron" could be used interchangeably.<sup>15</sup> Is it possible that when Joseph Smith translated these passages from a modified form of Hebrew/Egyptian, he understood the Gadianton "girdle" to be an "apron"?

So why would this seemingly obscure item of clothing be worthy of our attention? Perhaps the answer can be found in the context of biblical passages that use the same imagery as those from the Book of Mormon and also have an important ritual background.

- (2 Kings 1:8) "a girdle of leather about his loins"
- (Matthew 3:4) "a leathern girdle about his loins"
- (Mark 1:6) "a girdle of skin about his loins"

It will not escape the reader's attention that the Old Testament passage refers to the prophet Elijah, who played a central role in the restoration of Latter-day Saint temple worship.<sup>16</sup> The other two New Testament passages refer to John the Baptist, who was the lawful high priest of the Jerusalem temple and the one who restored the ancient temple priesthood to the Prophet Joseph Smith.<sup>17</sup> Since it is a commonly held view among Bible commentators that the attire worn by John the Baptist was in direct imitation of the clothing worn by Elijah, it is of great interest that the text of 2 Kings 1:8 can be translated not only to say "a girdle of leather" but also "a leather apron."<sup>18</sup> The temple connection is significant because the temple priests of ancient Israel wore a piece of ritual clothing called the *ephod*. Some scholars believe

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<sup>15</sup> Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language* (London: Strahan, 1755), s.v. "girdle"; definition #1 broadly includes: "Any thing drawn round the waist, and tied or buckled." See also Noah Webster, *An American Dictionary of the English Language* (New York: Converse, 1828), s.v. "apron" and "girdle."

<sup>16</sup> Stephen D. Ricks, "The Appearance of Elijah and Moses in the Kirtland Temple and the Jewish Passover," *BYU Studies* 23/4 (1983): 483-86; John P. Pratt, "The Restoration of Priesthood Keys on Easter 1836—Part 2: Symbolism of Passover and of Elijah's Return," *Ensign* (July 1985): 55-64; *The Words of Joseph Smith*, ed. Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook (Orem, Utah: Grandin Book, 1991), 327-36, hereafter cited as *WJS*; Doctrine and Covenants 2 and 110.

<sup>17</sup> *WJS*, 157-58, 234-35, 327-29; Doctrine and Covenants 13.

<sup>18</sup> Samuel Sandmel, ed., *The New English Bible with the Apocrypha: Oxford Study Edition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 385.



that in some instances this item of apparel was "a kind of leather apron."<sup>19</sup>

### The Ephod in Ancient Israel

The Israelite priests were commanded by the Lord to wear divinely revealed items of ritual attire when they ministered before him in the tabernacle and temples.<sup>20</sup> Among the items to be worn was a curious piece of clothing called the *ephod*, a Hebrew word left untranslated in the King James Bible, and in numerous other Bibles, because of the uncertainty among scholars regarding its identity, form, and function. Over the centuries divergent interpretations have been given to this piece of apparel, but I wish to draw the reader's attention to the footnoting system of the LDS edition of the King James Bible, which very distinctly identifies the ephod as "a special apron."<sup>21</sup> This view finds support in a growing number of scholarly writings<sup>22</sup> and, indeed, some Bible

<sup>19</sup> G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 5:260.

<sup>20</sup> For information on this ritual clothing, see Hugh W. Nibley, "Sacred Vestments," in *Temple and Cosmos* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 91-138; John A. Tvedtnes, "Priestly Clothing in Bible Times," in *Temples of the Ancient World*, 649-704; Stephen D. Ricks, "The Garment of Adam in Jewish, Muslim, and Christian Tradition," in *Temples of the Ancient World*, 705-39; Blake Ostler, "Clothed Upon: A Unique Aspect of Christian Antiquity," *BYU Studies* 22/1 (1982): 31-45.

<sup>21</sup> LDS Bible, 1979 ed., Exodus 39:2 n. a, directing the reader also to Exodus 28:6 (6-14). This identification is confirmed in the *Old Testament Institute Student Manual*, vol. 1, *Genesis-2 Samuel*, 2nd rev. ed. (Salt Lake City: Corporation of the President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981), 152. See also Ellis T. Rasmussen, *A Latter-day Saint Commentary on the Old Testament* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1993), 115; Victor L. Ludlow, *Unlocking the Old Testament* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981), 29. An interesting depiction of this apron can be found in T. C. Ducdale's painting, "Hezekiah Reopens the Temple," *Ensign* (March 1982): inside back cover.

<sup>22</sup> John P. Whalen, ed., *The New Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), 5:461-62, calls the ephod "a small apron." See also Donald Senior, ed., *The Catholic Study Bible: New American Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 92 n. 28, 6; *The New Open Bible: Study Edition, New American Standard Bible* (Nashville: Nelson, 1990), 99; Cheyne, *Encyclopaedia Biblica*, 2:1308; Charles M. Laymon, ed., *The Interpreter's One-Volume Commentary on the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1971), 61; Allen C.

translations have even incorporated the word *apron* directly into the text in place of the Hebrew word *ephod*.<sup>23</sup>

Even though the appearance of the ephod has long been the subject of imaginative conjecture, we can piece together a fairly consistent picture of it from the writings of several modern scholars. According to these commentators this priestly apron covered only the lower front part of the body,<sup>24</sup> "extending from the loins to the thighs,"<sup>25</sup> and was secured by the priest at his waist by tying together the ends of an attached white linen belt behind his back.<sup>26</sup> The main body of this apron was also made of fine white linen,<sup>27</sup> and the high priest's apron was embroidered in some manner with threads of pure gold and the sacred colors blue, purple, and red.<sup>28</sup> The high priest's apron was also unique in that it

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Myers, ed., *The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 342; Meyers, "Ephod," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 2:550; J. P. Hyatt, *The New Century Bible Commentary: Exodus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 282; P. Kyle McCarter Jr., *1 Samuel* (New York: Doubleday, 1980), 83; George A. Buttrick, ed., *The Interpreter's Bible* (New York: Abingdon, 1952), 1:1039; Bruce M. Metzger and Roland E. Murphy, eds., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 106; Moshe Levine, *The Tabernacle: Its Structure and Utensils* (Tel Aviv: Melechet Hamishkan, 1969), 130–31; Ellen Frankel and Betsy P. Teutsch, *The Encyclopedia of Jewish Symbols* (London: Aronson, 1992), 131.

<sup>23</sup> Curtis Vaughan, *Twenty-Six Translations of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 1:259–61, 886, 963, 1013, 1186, 1316; 3:563.

<sup>24</sup> Baker, "Apron," in *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia*, 1:230. Cheyne notes that, despite what some commentators imagine, "nothing is said in the text about a back piece, nor is there anything to suggest that the ephod was made in two parts; [Exodus] 28:8 again seems to exclude such a construction." Cheyne, *Encyclopaedia Biblica*, 2:1308.

<sup>25</sup> J. E. Steinmueller, "Ephod," in *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 5:461–62. Another source indicates that it was "suspended from the waist level downward." Meyers, "Ephod," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 2:550.

<sup>26</sup> Menahem Haran, *Temples and Temple-Service in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978), 166–67. This attached belt, called "the curious girdle of the ephod," was made of fine white linen and embroidered with the sacred colors of the tabernacle (see Exodus 28:8; 29:5; 39:5, 20–21; Leviticus 8:7).

<sup>27</sup> W. E. Vine, *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Old Tappan, N.J.: Revell, 1985), 62–63. Although the high priest's apron was richly embroidered, biblical texts seem to indicate that the ordinary priests only wore plain white linen aprons (see 1 Samuel 2:18–19; 22:18).

<sup>28</sup> Golden garments were reserved in the ancient world for kings, priests, and gods. Yehoshua M. Grintz, "Ephod," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 6:804;



had two embroidered straps permanently attached to the top of the horizontal belt, or "curious girdle of the ephod," which were then connected to the shoulderpieces on his robe. Between these straps the high priest secured the embroidered and jewel-encrusted breastplate and placed the Urim and Thummim in the pocket of the breastplate so that the revelatory stones were located over his heart (see Exodus 28:6–30; D&C 130:6–11). Haran has noted that the method of embroidery used on this apron was considered the most sacred kind (*ḥôšēb*), a method which involved the use of figures or designs, although it is not known exactly what type of designs were used.<sup>29</sup> In accordance with our description, figure 1 illustrates what some scholars consider to be the prototypical form of ancient Israel's ephod.

It is possible that because of its distinctive character, and the prominence given to it in the biblical text, the ephod was the most important piece of ritual clothing worn by the temple priests.<sup>30</sup> But the priests were not the only ones in Israel to wear a ritual apron. Besides the prophet Elijah (see 1 Kings 1:8), we read that the prophet Samuel was required to wear a robe and linen apron while serving in the tabernacle (see 1 Samuel 2:18–19). Ancient Jewish writers indicated that the disciples of the prophets were also accustomed to wearing an ephod.<sup>31</sup> One ancient account of the

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Meyers, "Ephod," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 2:550; A. Leo Oppenheim, "The Golden Garments of the Gods," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 8 (1949): 172–93. Both the Lord and angels are described in scripture as wearing golden sashes over long white linen robes (see Daniel 10:5; Revelation 1:13; 15:6).

<sup>29</sup> Haran, *Temples and Temple Service*, 161, 167. It is also not known just where the embroidery was located on the high priest's apron for, as Haran explains in 167 n. 39, "Perhaps these designs do not cover the whole of the ephod but are confined to its upper part, girdled around the thighs [i.e., on the linen belt or 'curious girdle']. This would account for the name of that part of the ephod—*ḥēšēb*, cognate with the workmanship of *ḥôšēb*." This suggests that the main body of the high priest's apron may have consisted of unadorned fine white linen, just like the aprons worn by the other priests and the other pieces of the priestly clothing (see Exodus 28:1–43; Leviticus 16:4). "Hebrew *heshev* appears only in connection with the ephod. It probably derives from the stem *h-v-sh*, 'to bind,' with the order of the second and third consonants reversed." Nahum M. Sarna, *Exodus* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 179.

<sup>30</sup> Sarna, *Exodus*, 178.

<sup>31</sup> Isadore Singer, ed., *The Jewish Encyclopedia* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1903), 5:187. An ancient Hebrew manuscript called the Golden

priestly investiture ceremony says that the apron was symbolic of "prophetic power."<sup>32</sup> This connection can be seen in the belief that the ephod originated as the apparel of deity and was worn on the earth by those who represented and spoke in deity's behalf.<sup>33</sup> The tools that were employed among the Israelites to facilitate this spokespersonship were the Urim and Thummim, which, of course, were attached directly to the apron of the high priest.

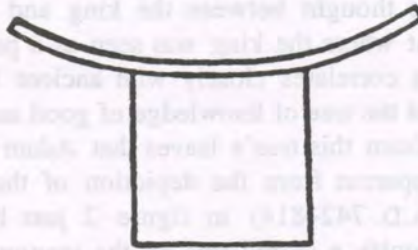


Figure 1. Theodore C. Foote, "The Ephod," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 21 (1902): 42.

Some evidence indicates that the kings of Israel may also have worn ritual aprons. We read in one biblical text that when King David entered the temple area he was washed, anointed, "and changed his apparel" just like the priests (2 Samuel 12:20). Two other passages specify that when King David was engaged in temple-related activities he wore "a robe of fine linen" and "an ephod of linen" (1 Chronicles 15:27; 2 Samuel 6:14). Some scholars maintain that the king's attire directly imitated that which

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Haggadah (ca. A.D. 1320) depicts the prophets Noah and Abraham, as well as temple priests, wearing aprons. David Goldstein, *Jewish Legends*, rev. ed. (New York: Bedrick, 1987), 45, 58; *Passover* (Minneapolis: Winston, 1986), 34.

<sup>32</sup> James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1983), 1:791. Another translation of this document calls the apron "the ephod of prophecy." Harm W. Hollander and Marinus De Jonge, *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs: A Commentary* (Leiden: Brill, 1985), 149, 152.

<sup>33</sup> John I. Durham, *Exodus* (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1987), 386.



was worn by the prophets and priests.<sup>34</sup> Some scholars have also proposed that Israel's kings and priests wore the apron over their white linen robe.<sup>35</sup>

In some Hebrew theological circles it was held that Adam was the first earthly king, and the kings of Israel were thus seen as imitators of the first man (see Genesis 1:26–28).<sup>36</sup> Since Adam wore an apron made of fig leaves (see Genesis 3:7), is it possible that the apron worn by Israel's king somehow imitated the one worn by Adam? A strong connection was made in ancient Near Eastern religious thought between the king and the tree of life, even to the point where the king was seen as a personification of that tree.<sup>37</sup> This correlates closely with ancient Hebrew legends which taught that the tree of knowledge of good and evil was a fig tree and it was from this tree's leaves that Adam constructed his apron.<sup>38</sup> It is apparent from the depiction of the Christian king Charlemagne (A.D. 742–814) in figure 2 just how the ancient king could personify a sacred tree by the iconography upon his apron.

<sup>34</sup> Leon Yarden, *The Tree of Light* (Uppsala: Skriv Service Ab, 1972), 53: The high priest's robes are "the same as the robes of Prophets and Kings"; Meyers, *Eerdmans Bible Dictionary*, 342.

<sup>35</sup> Meyers, *Eerdmans Bible Dictionary*, 342; Laymon, *Interpreter's One-Volume Commentary on the Bible*, 61.

<sup>36</sup> Aage Bentzen, *King and Messiah* (London: Lutterworth, 1955), 39–47; Herbert G. May, "The King in the Garden of Eden: A Study of Ezekiel 28:12–19," in *Israel's Prophetic Heritage*, ed. Bernhard W. Anderson and Walter Harrelson (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1962), 166–76; Frederick H. Borsch, *The Son of Man in Myth and History* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1967), 96. Jesus Christ is the King of Israel (see John 1:49) and bears the title *Adam* (1 Corinthians 15:45, 47). His high-priestly robe and apron are mentioned below.

<sup>37</sup> Geo Widengren, *The King and the Tree of Life in Ancient Near Eastern Religion* (Uppsala: Lundequistska, 1951), 42–43, 58.

<sup>38</sup> William R. Telford, *The Barren Temple and the Withered Tree* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1980), 190; R. H. Charles, ed., *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976), 2:146; Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, 1:75; Gerhard Friedrich, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 7:752 n. 19; Robert Graves and Raphael Patai, *Hebrew Myths: The Book of Genesis* (New York: Crown, 1983), 77. Since the tree of life represents immortality, the tree of knowledge can be seen as representing just the opposite, or the state of mortality that was brought about through it.



Figure 2. William Smith and Samuel Cheetham, *A Dictionary of Christian Antiquities* (New York: Kraus, 1968), 2:1307.

### Egyptian, Maya, and Christian Aprons

We will now look at three other ancient cultures that used ritual aprons and how they may be related to the lambskin apparel in 3 Nephi 4:7. First, the Egyptians. Both the kings and priests of Egypt wore ceremonial or ritual aprons. The royal apron in particular was a very ancient symbol, going all the way back to the Archaic Period when gods and kings wore a *shemset*, which consisted of a sash with an attached apron made from narrow strips of leather or pendant beads. Altogether, this object was considered to be a “symbol of power.”<sup>39</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Manfred Lurker, *The Gods and Symbols of Ancient Egypt: An Illustrated Dictionary* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1980), 110–11. These stringlike aprons have an Israelite equivalent in the Vatican copy of the *Testament of Job*, wherein the inheritance Job bestows upon his daughters consists of “three cordlike aprons.” Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 1:864. See also figure 3 above.



The apron worn by the Egyptian priests was made from simple white linen and was worn over a white linen robe.<sup>40</sup> Some biblical scholars have noticed the striking similarity between the white linen priestly aprons of ancient Israel and Egypt.<sup>41</sup> It is even felt by some that the name of the Israelite apron, *ephod*, is derived from the Egyptian word *ifd*.<sup>42</sup> The close connection between these two civilizations, especially in ritual matters, should come as no real surprise considering their close geographical proximity and extended cultural interaction. Even beyond these considerations, Hebrew legends relate how the founders of Egypt "borrowed" the priestly clothing of Noah for their own purposes.<sup>43</sup> When the Egyptian king functioned in his role as high priest, his robes were very similar to those worn by the temple priests, except that his apron had a very distinctive form and was decorated with exclusive emblems.<sup>44</sup>

During the period of the Middle Kingdom, the ritual apron was appropriated by ordinary Egyptians for use in their personal initiation and burial rites. An example of this can be seen in Facsimile 3 of the book of Abraham, where the initiate is ceremonially dressed for admittance into the presence of deity.<sup>45</sup> One of

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<sup>40</sup> Waley-el-dine Sameh, *Daily Life in Ancient Egypt* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), 83.

<sup>41</sup> Laymon, *Interpreter's One-Volume Commentary on the Bible*, 61; John L. McKenzie, *Dictionary of the Bible* (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1965), 242.

<sup>42</sup> John A. Tvedtnes, "Egyptian Etymologies for Biblical Cultic Paraphernalia," in *Scripta Hierosolymitana*, ed. Sarah Israelit-Groll (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1982), 28:218; J. Lyman Redd, "Aaron's Consecration: Its Nature, Purpose, and Meaning," in *Thy People Shall Be My People and Thy God My God*, ed. Paul Y. Hoskisson (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994), 124-25, 133-34, nn. 20, 22.

<sup>43</sup> Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, 1:177; compare with Abraham 1:26. See also Hugh W. Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert, World of the Jaredites, There Were Jaredites* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988), 168-71.

<sup>44</sup> I. Gardner Wilkinson, *The Manners and Customs of the Ancient Egyptians* (New York: Scribner and Welford, 1879), 2:326.

<sup>45</sup> Facsimile 3, in the Pearl of Great Price, 41. Figures 5 and 6 are both dressed in pleated and fringed aprons secured by knotted sashes. The "apron was generally fastened by a girdle, or by a sort of sash, tied in front in a bow or knot." Wilkinson, *The Manners and Customs of the Ancient Egyptians*, 2:323. This sounds very much like the Israelite priest's sash which was "wound under the breast, twice around the body, was tied in an ample bow or loop, and the ends reached to the ankles. It was thrown over the left shoulder while the priest was

the initiatory aprons illustrated in figure 3 catches our attention because its beads form the lily and papyrus plants, which were, respectively, the sacred symbols of Upper and Lower Egypt. The foliage on this apron thus served to identify the nationality of the wearer. An interesting parallel might be seen in the fig leaf aprons of Adam and Eve (see Genesis 3:7) since some commentators believe that in ancient times the fig tree represented the nation of Israel.<sup>46</sup>

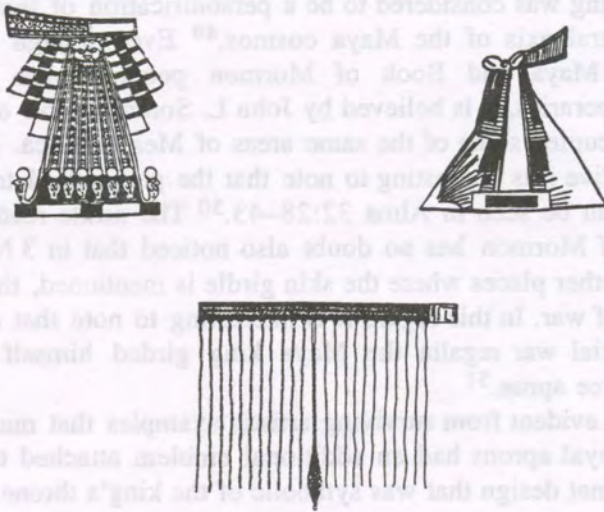


Figure 3. Various Egyptian aprons worn by kings, priests, and initiates. Doreen Yarwood, *Encyclopedia of World Costume* (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1978), 16; William C. Hayes, *The Scepter of Egypt* (New York: Abrams, 1990), 1:309.

officiating." Cheyne, *Encyclopaedia Biblica*, 2:1735. The Egyptian symbol of the knotted sash (*tet*) is known as "the blood of Isis" and closely resembles the symbol of life (*ankh*). Though its original meaning is unknown, the *tet* symbol "is similar in many ways to the knot in the girdle worn by gods." Lurker, *Gods and Symbols of Ancient Egypt*, 72.

<sup>46</sup> Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke X-XXIV* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1985), 1008. Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 7:751-57.



A type of foliated apron was also worn by the Maya kings of Mesoamerica.<sup>47</sup> The Maya royal apron was knee length, covered only the front part of the body, was worn underneath a royal belt, and was decorated with a glyph known as god C. The phonetic reading of this glyph is *k'ul*, which is the Maya word for sacred, holy, or divinity. Therefore this glyph is an identifying icon for the attribute of "holiness" and designates the object to which it is attached as being in such a state.<sup>48</sup> More significant, however, is the nature of the god C glyph because it is derived from the *Wacah Chan*, the Maya "world tree" or tree of life symbol. The Maya king was considered to be a personification of that tree and the central axis of the Maya cosmos.<sup>49</sup> Even though the best-known Maya and Book of Mormon peoples were not fully contemporaries, it is believed by John L. Sorenson and others that they occupied some of the same areas of Mesoamerica. From this perspective it is interesting to note that the personified tree of life motif can be seen in Alma 32:28–43.<sup>50</sup> The astute reader of the Book of Mormon has no doubt also noticed that in 3 Nephi 4:7, and in other places where the skin girdle is mentioned, the context is that of war. In this regard it is interesting to note that as part of his special war regalia the Maya king girded himself with the world tree apron.<sup>51</sup>

It is evident from surviving artistic examples that many of the Maya royal aprons had an additional emblem attached to them, a woven mat design that was symbolic of the king's throne and thus

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<sup>47</sup> For possible ties between things Maya and Egyptian see "Old World People in the New?" (Parts 1 and 2), FARMS Updates, *Insights* (April and June 1995), 2. Compare 1 Nephi 1:2.

<sup>48</sup> Linda Schele and David Freidel, *A Forest of Kings: The Untold Story of the Ancient Maya* (New York: Morrow, 1990), 410.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 418; see also n. 37 above.

<sup>50</sup> The personified green olive tree in the temple is found in Psalm 52:8; Zechariah 4:2–3, 11–14; and Revelation 11:1–4. The personified tree motif can also be seen in Psalm 1:1–3; Jeremiah 11:16; 17:7–8; and Judges 9:8–11. Joseph Smith identified the tree of life as an olive tree in the preface to Doctrine and Covenants 88. The Prophet and his associates also used the imagery of the personified tree (*HC*, 1:444, 466; D&C 135:6).

<sup>51</sup> Linda Schele and Mary Ellen Miller, *The Blood of Kings: Dynasty and Ritual in Maya Art* (Fort Worth: Kimbell Art Museum, 1986), 76–77, 86.

his "authority, overlordship and power."<sup>52</sup> Eventually, like its Egyptian counterpart, the Maya royal apron was appropriated by the general populace (see fig. 4).<sup>53</sup>

We will now turn our attention to ancient Christian aprons. We have already mentioned that the prophets, priests, and kings of ancient Israel wore aprons that symbolized their prophetic power, divine priesthood, and legitimate authority to reign over the people. The New Testament Saints were no different, for they were also prophets, priests, and kings (see Ephesians 2:20; Revelation 1:6). Did they wear the same ritual robes as their ancestors? The evidence is that they did. Their example in doing so seems to have come from the Lord Jesus Christ himself, *the* Prophet, Priest, and King of Israel (see John 1:49; 6:14; 12:13 Hebrews 3:1). A curious passage in John 19:23 says that the Lord possessed a robe "without seam," which he wore to the crucifixion and may have had with him during the Upper Room activities that commence with John 13. Commentators see in this reference a direct parallel to the robe of Israel's high priest, which was constructed after the same manner (see Exodus 28:31-32).<sup>54</sup> In John 13:4-5 we read that Jesus "took a towel, and girded himself . . . and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded." The word translated here as "towel" can also be translated as "servant's apron."<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Francis Robicsek, *A Study in Maya Art and History: The Mat Symbol* (New York: Museum of the American Indian, 1975), 184.

<sup>53</sup> See the illustrations and commentary in Milton R. Hunter, *Archaeology and the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1956), 1:67-69; see also the material found in Anthony W. Ivins, *The Relationship of "Mormonism" and Freemasonry* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1934), 123-24.

<sup>54</sup> Scholars have long noted that the activities of John 17 are centered on temple worship and that when Jesus Christ offered his prayer in that chapter he was acting in the capacity of the high priest. For an insightful commentary, see William J. Hamblin, "Temple Motifs in John 17" (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1995).

<sup>55</sup> Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 5:306, 308. James E. Talmage said that "the Lord laid aside His outer garments and girded Himself with a towel as an apron." James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1983), 552.



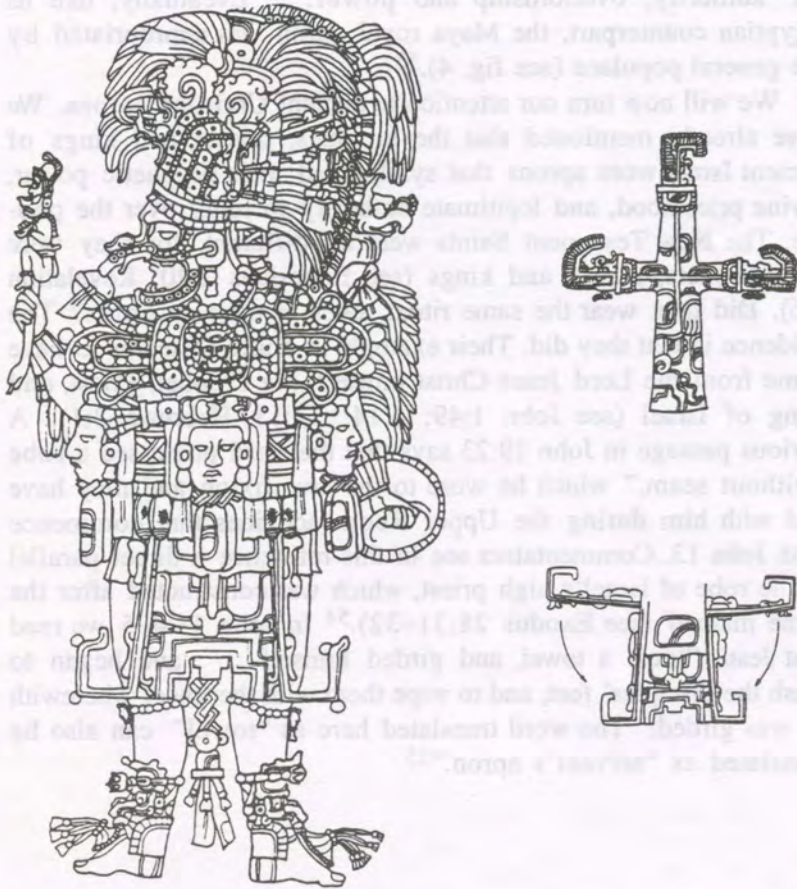


Figure 4. The Maya tree of life and its transformation into the royal apron. Linda Schele and Mary Ellen Miller, *The Blood of Kings: Dynasty and Ritual in Maya Art* (Fort Worth: Kimbell Art Museum, 1986), 77.

Aprons are mentioned in Acts 19:12 though scholars have some doubt about their precise nature.<sup>56</sup> The Greek word used for

<sup>56</sup> Hastings, *Dictionary of the Apostolic Church*, 1:87. This source speculates that these aprons were made from either linen or leather. The activity connected with the aprons in Acts 19:12 is also mentioned in the Kirtland-era patriarchal blessing of Lorenzo Snow, in Thomas C. Romney, *The Life of Lorenzo Snow* (Salt Lake City: Sugarhouse, 1955), 1.

the aprons, *simikinthion*, indicates that they were shaped in the same manner as the Israelite temple aprons, covering only the lower front part of the body.<sup>57</sup> Perhaps this correlates with several texts in which some of Christ's apostles wore ritual clothing directly associated with the robes of the high priest and "exercised the priestly office after the manner of the old priesthood."<sup>58</sup> This may also help to explain why some of the earliest Christian monks in Egypt wore leather aprons and sashes such as that illustrated in figure 5.<sup>59</sup> Some Greek Orthodox monks still wear the leather aprons and sashes they inherited from their Egyptian counterparts<sup>60</sup> and, of course, the Roman Catholic and Anglican liturgical vestments have included a species of apron in times past.<sup>61</sup>

The next pertinent question we should ask ourselves is What kind of leather were the Christian aprons made of? Various traditions hold that Elijah, Elisha, Ezekiel the temple priest, and several early Christian Saints wore sheepskin clothing.<sup>62</sup> Why so? Perhaps

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<sup>57</sup> DeHoog, "Apron," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 1:217.

<sup>58</sup> William Smith and Samuel Cheetham, *A Dictionary of Christian Antiquities* (New York: Kraus, 1968), 2:1214. The apostle John is included among this group, confirming in Revelation 1:6 that he and others had been made kings and priests unto God.

<sup>59</sup> Karel C. Innemee, *Ecclesiastical Dress in the Medieval Near East* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 99, 102-4.

<sup>60</sup> Philip Sherrard, *Athos—The Holy Mountain* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1982), 57, 123, 127, 129, 131; John J. Norwich and Reresby Sitwell, *Mount Athos* (London: Hutchinson of London, 1966), 28, 66, 69. For insights into why these elements of temple worship were prominent among the Christians in Egypt, see William J. Hamblin, "Aspects of an Early Christian Initiation Ritual," in *By Study and Also by Faith*, 1:202-21.

<sup>61</sup> F. L. Cross, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), 76; Cheyne, *Encyclopaedia Biblica*, 2:1308, see also n. 4. Some writers are of the opinion that Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox liturgical clothing is a modified version of ancient Israel's temple robes; see W. Gunther Plaut, *The Torah: A Modern Commentary* (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1981), 617. For background material, see Hugh W. Nibley, "Christian Envy of the Temple," in *Mormonism and Early Christianity* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1987), 391-434.

<sup>62</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 329 n. 291; William L. Lane, *Hebrews 9-13* (Dallas: Word





Figure 5. St. Anthony of Egypt, who is regarded as the founder of Monasticism. Michael Walsh, *The Triumph of the Meek* (New York: Harper & Row, 1986), 221.

the idea goes back to the story of God providing “coats of skins” for Adam and Eve (see Genesis 3:21). Some Hebrew traditions maintain that this divine clothing was made from sheepskin.<sup>63</sup>

Books, 1991), 391; Janet Mayo, *A History of Ecclesiastical Dress* (London: Batsford, 1984), 17, 27.

<sup>63</sup> Rutherford H. Platt Jr., ed., *The Forgotten Books of Eden* (Cleveland: World Publishing, 1927), 33–34; Graves and Patai, *Hebrew Myths*, 77–78. Third Nephi 27:19, Ether 13:10, and Revelation 7:13–14 may be relevant here because of the connection made between the white garments worn by the Saints and the sacrifice of the Lamb. Some scholars have speculated that the leather for Adam and Eve’s clothing was obtained through the first act of ritual sacrifice, which was a type and shadow of the future sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the Lamb. See Robert S. Candlish, *Studies in Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1979), 81–82; Franz Delitzsch, *A New Commentary on Genesis* (Minneapolis: Klock & Klock, 1978), 1:171; Adam Clark, *Clarke’s Commentary* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1977), 1:55; Matthew Henry and Thomas Scott, *Commentary on the Holy Bible* (Nashville: Nelson, 1979), 1:14. Perhaps Moses 5:5–7 and Abel’s sacrifice of

Other traditions claim that Adam's raiment was nothing less than the prototype of the high priest's temple robes (see Exodus 28) and that he, and righteous firstborn sons after him, wore this clothing when they offered sacrifices.<sup>64</sup>

This perspective may help explain the warning given by the Lord to his disciples to beware of "false prophets which come to you in sheep's clothing" (Matthew 7:15). In Zechariah 13:4 we learn that false prophets were in the habit of dressing in the same distinctive vestments worn by the true prophets in order to deceive the people with their message. This is also reminiscent of 2 Corinthians 11:13-14, where we learn that false prophets somehow "transform" themselves to be like the Lord's apostles just as "Satan himself is *transformed* into an angel of light" (emphasis added). Curiously enough, Joseph Smith taught that one of the

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sheep (Moses 5:17, 20) should be considered in this light. We must not neglect to mention Jacob's investiture with sacrificial goatskins in the ritual context of his reception of the birthright blessing of the firstborn son; see Susan Ackerman, "The Deception of Isaac, Jacob's Dream at Bethel, and Incubation on an Animal Skin," in *Priesthood and Cult in Ancient Israel*, ed. Gary A. Anderson and Saul M. Olyan (Sheffield: JSOT, 1991), 92-120; see Genesis 27:15-16. Hebrew tradition holds that on this occasion Jacob was dressed in the priestly robes of Adam. Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, 1:332.

<sup>64</sup> Menahem M. Kasher, *Encyclopedia of Biblical Interpretation* (New York: American Biblical Encyclopedia Society, 1953), 1:137-38; Graves and Patai, *Hebrew Myth*, 78; Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, 1:332, 5:103-4, 283. Three features in the Genesis 3:21 text parallel the Exodus 28 account and thus point to these conclusions: (1) The word translated as "coat" (*k'ṯōnef*) is a "robelike garment" and is the same article of clothing worn by the temple priests in Exodus 28:39; see Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 207. (2) The terminology "clothed them" uses the same verb form as when Moses invests the temple priests with their linen coats in Exodus 28:41; see Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15* (Waco: Word Books, 1987), 84. (3) Both the Edenic and priestly clothing serve the same purpose: to cover the nakedness of those who stand in the Lord's presence, as mentioned in Exodus 28:43; see Frank E. Gaebel, ed., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Genesis-Numbers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 2:58. Some researchers believe that Adam's garments were not only priestly but also royal in character; see Moses Aberbach and Bernard Grossfeld, *Targum Onkelos to Genesis* (New York: Ktav, 1982), 38. All these views are logical when one considers that the garden of Eden served as the earth's first temple. Donald W. Parry, "The Garden of Eden: Prototype Sanctuary," in *Temples of the Ancient World*, 126-51.



ploy Satan uses to deceive others into thinking that he is an "angel of light" is that he wears "holy garb."<sup>65</sup> This leads us directly back to the circumstances surrounding 3 Nephi 4:7 and a possible explanation for why the lambskin apparel is mentioned there.

### Wolves in Sheep's Clothing

Thirteen years after the Book of Mormon's final mention of the leather apparel (see 3 Nephi 4:7), the Lord personally warned his followers to beware of false prophets who would approach them in "sheep's clothing" (3 Nephi 14:15). This could be seen both as metaphorical language and as an identifying characteristic of the Nephite's enemy. Alma 43:20 mentions that some among the Nephite's enemy were accustomed to wearing "a skin which was girded about their loins." A few verses earlier we learn that the enemy consisted of dissenters, apostates, and "descendants of the priests of Noah" (Alma 43:13). Daniel Peterson has noted several times that the Gadianton robbers should be viewed as "an alternative religious option within Nephite society."<sup>66</sup> In the beginning of this paper, I proposed that the Nephite temple priests may have worn the priestly robes prescribed for use among the ancient Israelites. If so, it is conceivable that the "descendants of the priests of Noah" may have introduced this sacred clothing among members of the secret combinations because they wanted to make a claim for legitimate priestly power. Indeed, there is evidence within the Book of Mormon itself that members of the secret combinations were blasphemous imitators of the holy order of God.<sup>67</sup> And since the objectives of priestcraft and the secret

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<sup>65</sup> HC, 4:573. "These evil 'angels' use deception as their main tool of destruction. They simulate all that is good. . . . Sometimes they may come as angels of light, in borrowed or stolen raiment. Always they fail to reveal themselves as they are." John A. Widtsoe, *Evidences and Reconciliations* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1960), 108-9.

<sup>66</sup> Daniel C. Peterson, "The Gadianton Robbers as Guerrilla Warriors," 146, and "Notes on Gadianton Masonry," 204, 212, both in *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*.

<sup>67</sup> Victor L. Ludlow, "Secret Covenant Teachings of Men and the Devil in Helaman through 3 Nephi 8," in *The Book of Mormon: Helaman through 3 Nephi 8, According to Thy Word*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr.

combinations were one and the same (to get gain) it is proposed that this is the context in which the lambskin apparel of 3 Nephi 4:7 can best be understood. The following ideas should serve to illustrate this point.

- Priestcraft: “*get gain* and praise of the world” (2 Nephi 26:29); “riches and honor” (Alma 1:16)
- Secret Combinations: “*get gain*” (Moses 5:31; Helaman 6:17); “kingdoms and great glory” (Ether 8:9)

One more correlation should be pointed out here. The apron was an emblem of power in several ancient cultures, but in Israel it could represent the power to speak rightfully in the name of God (prophet), to administer legally his saving ordinances (priest), and to reign lawfully in his stead (king). The express purpose of those who joined the secret combinations was for them to obtain *power* (see Helaman 2:8; Ether 8:14–19, 22–23; 11:15). What could have been a more meaningful symbol for them than an emblem which for long ages past had represented the very thing for which they sought?

Sorenson has demonstrated several parallels between the Gadianton robbers and ancient Mesoamerican secret societies. Members of one secret society, called the *nahualistas*, carried pieces of sacred animal skin on their person as a symbol of the “power” given to them by their *nahual* or guardian animal spirit.<sup>68</sup> New members of these societies were required to go through an initiation ceremony in which they were taught secret knowledge by a “religious” or semipriestly order known as “master magicians.”<sup>69</sup> This is particularly intriguing because in Mormon 1:18–19 a connection is made between the secret combinations and the practice of magic. In Moses 5:30–31 and 49 a connection is also made between secret combinations and the strange title *Master Mahan*. Anti-Mormon critics have long claimed that *Master Mahan* is a thinly veiled variation of *Master Mason*, which is the designation for the third degree of initiation within Freemasonry. They believe that the presence of this title in LDS scripture clearly

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(Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1992), 273, 281; see also Abraham 1:26.

<sup>68</sup> Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting*, 301.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 302; see 300–309.



demonstrates that Joseph Smith plagiarized Masonic material for his creative ventures. Footnote *d* for Moses 5:31, however, offers several possible meanings for *Mahan* based on its etymological root.<sup>70</sup> Of the choices offered I personally feel that “destroyer” is the most probable one. My reasoning for this is that the Hebrew word *maha* means “destroy,”<sup>71</sup> and the addition of an *n* would make the word a noun.<sup>72</sup> Hence, *maha(n)* = *destroy(er)*. Destruction is one of the attributes applied to Satan in the scriptures (see John 8:44; 1 Corinthians 5:5; Hebrews 2:14; 1 Peter 5:8), and he has been identified as the *destroyer* in latter-day revelation.<sup>73</sup> In Moses 5:29–31 we read that it was after Cain had bound himself to Satan with a secret oath, accompanied by the threat of destruction if he revealed this action, that he obtained the title *Mahan*. It would appear that he obtained this title because he had been taught how to become a destroyer himself. It is of interest to note that in certain ancient cultures Satan was known by the name *Mahoun* and those who swore their allegiance to him acquired that name for themselves.<sup>74</sup>

<sup>70</sup> See Nibley's interpretation of the word in Hugh Nibley, *Ancient Documents and the Pearl of Great Price* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1994), lecture 19, p. 12.

<sup>71</sup> George V. Wigram, *The New Englishman's Hebrew Concordance* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1984), 686, #4229; James Strong, *The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville: Nelson, 1990), Hebrew and Chaldee Dictionary, 64, #4229; G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 8:227–31; R. Laird Harris, ed., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 1:498–99; Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1952), 563.

<sup>72</sup> E. Kautzsch, ed., *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, 2nd rev. ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1974), 238. My thanks to John A. Tvedtnes for bringing this source to my attention and clarifying this concept.

<sup>73</sup> Hoyt W. Brewster Jr., *Doctrine & Covenants Encyclopedia* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1988), 132.

<sup>74</sup> John Jamieson, *An Etymological Dictionary of the Scottish Language*, rev. ed. (Paisley, Scotland: Gardner, 1879), 3:205; see also the various references in D. Michael Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1987), 167 n. 4.

## The Masonic Lambskin Apron

Freemasons are invested with a lambskin apron during their initiation rituals, but this apparel does not seem to have an ancient and distinguished background. Masonic historians admit that when it comes to the question of antiquity, “almost all that has been written” about the origin of the Masonic apron “is of little real value.”<sup>75</sup> It is further noted that “the Freemasons simply used the ordinary leather aprons of the operative [stone]masons” with whom they were connected in the early 1700s in Europe and incorporated it into their ritual system as a central symbol. Simply put, the speculative Freemasons were attempting “to imitate the operative masons” by *borrowing* the white leather apron from them.<sup>76</sup>

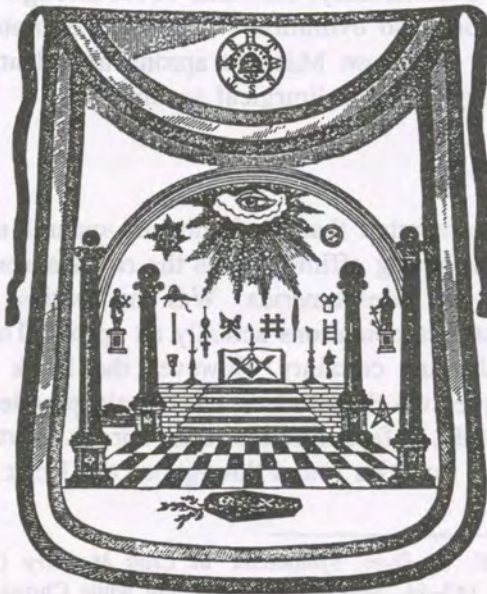


Figure 6. George Washington's lambskin Masonic apron as depicted in Allen E. Roberts, *The Craft and Its Symbols* (Richmond, Va.: Macoy, 1974), 11.

<sup>75</sup> W. Harry Rylands, "The Masonic Apron," in *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum* (Margate: Keble's Gazette Office, 1892), 5:172. The Quatuor Coronati Masonic Lodge of England, which publishes this journal, is considered to be the premier research lodge in all Freemasonry.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 5:174, 178.



The symbolism ascribed by Masons to their white lambskin apron is that it represents *innocence*. But even this idea is not original to Freemasonry. Some Masonic researchers have come to the conclusion that the white apron's meaning was derived directly from the white garment given to the ancient Christians when they were initiated into a state of innocence at baptism (see Revelation 3:5).<sup>77</sup> This concept goes much farther back among the Israelites. When the high priest entered the holy of holies on the Day of Atonement, each element of his vesture consisted of unadorned white linen (see Leviticus 16:4). This clothing signified that on that sacred day the nation was reborn and became innocent before the Lord (see Revelation 19:8).

The various symbols that decorate Masonic aprons are also not original to Freemasonry, but came about through a long process of assimilation and evolution.<sup>78</sup> It should be noted that some of the symbols found on Masonic aprons are identical to those found on Greek Orthodox liturgical aprons.<sup>79</sup>

## Conclusion

I have demonstrated that the lambskin apparel mentioned in 3 Nephi 4:7 has strong affinities with the ritual aprons of ancient Israel, Egypt, and Mesoamerica. Was the leather girdle worn among the secret combinations actually an apron? That cannot be known with absolute certainty. However, the Book of Mormon passages that mention this clothing are closely paralleled by biblical texts which do, in fact, describe ritual aprons. Furthermore, the Hebrew literary qualities found throughout the Book of Mormon,

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<sup>77</sup> Colin F. W. Dyer, *Symbolism in Craft Masonry* (London: Lewis Masonic, 1983), 143–44. Material on the ancient white Christian garment can be found in Wolfred N. Cote, *The Archaeology of Baptism* (London: Yates and Alexander, 1876), 53–55. Mackey admits that the association between lambskin and “innocence” is not an original Masonic idea. Mackey, *Encyclopaedia of Freemasonry*, 1:73.

<sup>78</sup> Rylands, “The Masonic Apron,” 172–73, 176, 178; see also Mackey, *Encyclopaedia of Freemasonry*, 1:73.

<sup>79</sup> The Greek Orthodox aprons were inherited from the Coptic monks. Both were made of leather. For illustrations see Sherrard, *Athos—The Holy Mountain*, 57, 123, 127, 129, 131; Norwich and Sitwell, *Mount Athos*, 28, 66, 69.

and especially within 3 Nephi 4:7, lend weight to the belief that the lambskin girdle has an authentically ancient Hebrew background and should be viewed in that context.

Why was the leather apparel worn by those among the secret combinations? If they were, indeed, imitating the ritual apron worn by the legitimate prophets, priests, and kings of Israel, these apostates would have been hard pressed to find a better symbol of the power and authority that they so much desired to usurp for themselves (see Helaman 7:4; Alma 25:4-5; D&C 76:28; 29:36; Moses 4:1-3). Why did the Book of Mormon authors make sure that this particular theme was presented to us in the latter-days? Perhaps to warn us of wolves in sheep's clothing (see Alma 5:59-60).

### Mack C. Stirling

Abstract: The Book of Mormon describes a great division in mankind between the few who walk in the way of life and the many who walk in the way of death. This division results from the response of each individual to Christ or to the voice of God during probation. Men either hearken to the voice of Christ and progressively acquire spiritual life or they hearken to the voice of the devil and progressively descend into spiritual death. Nine Book of Mormon texts are examined in detail for their teachings on life and death. A diagram is constructed to illustrate the idea of each text. The conception and portrayal of spiritual reality in terms of two mutually exclusive, progressively diverging, and correspondingly opposite ways of life and death are clearly demonstrated. This diachronic conception of reality underlies the entire Book of Mormon. An understanding of this paradigm is critical, both in order to appreciate the essential message of the Book of Mormon on life and death and to understand its theological relationship to the Doctrine and Covenants.

### Introduction

The concept of a way leading to spiritual life in opposition to a way leading to spiritual death pervades the Book of Mormon. Near the end of his great discourse on opposition in all things, Lehi declares that "men are free according to the flesh; . . . and they are free to choose liberty and eternal life through the great