

**“CLOTHES MAKE THE (ONE LIKE A SON OF) MAN”:
DRESS IMAGERY IN REVELATION 1 AS AN
INDICATOR OF HIGH PRIESTLY
STATUS**

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Problem

The Epistle to the Hebrews is the only document in the NT that explicitly describes Jesus as a high priest. The purpose of this dissertation is to ascertain whether or not the book of Revelation, in particular, in John’s description of the “one like a son of man” in his inaugural vision (1:12-16), implicitly presents Jesus as having a high priestly status.

Method

This study focuses on Revelation, since it is the work closest to Hebrews in terms of its rich cultic imagery; and it analyzes Revelation’s first chapter, since that is the part of Revelation where one finds the most contested arena of scholarly debate over Jesus’ high priestly status. In order to delimit the approach, this dissertation concentrates on dress imagery in Revelation 1 as a potential indicator of role-related high priestly status.

Chapter 1 of this dissertation states the problem and samples the various interpretations of the dress of the “one like a son of man” in Revelation 1, ranging from strenuous denials to strong advocacy of high priestly imagery and identity for Jesus. This chapter also notes the exegetical methodology to be employed in later chapters and presents the study’s delimitations. Chapter 2 examines the contemporary understanding of dress in terms of its ability to communicate meaning in general, to communicate identity in particular, and to more specifically communicate role-related identity. Chapter 3 surveys descriptions of dress in literature from the ancient Near East to the book of Revelation that communicate various identities, particular, role-related identity. Chapter 4 surveys the dress of the Israelite high priest worn both on a daily and a yearly basis, taking into consideration data from the Hebrew Bible and extrabiblical Jewish and Christian sources up to ca. 150 C.E. It also takes note of overlooked or ignored elements of the high priest’s dress. Based on that information, chapter 5 investigates and exegetes sartorial images for the “one like a son of man” in Revelation 1 that possibly communicate high priestly status: his foot-length robe (ποδήρη [1:13]); (2) his golden belt/sash (ζώνην χρυσᾶν [1:13]); and (3) his bare feet, described in terms of

the enigmatic term *χαλκολιβάνω* (1:15). Chapter 6 presents the results of this study, their implications, and possible directions for future research.

Results

Contemporary scholars of dress have concluded that the concept of dress includes not only clothes, but also ornaments, cosmetics, devices, treatments, equipment, and tools, and they have repeatedly maintained that dress communicates various types of identity. This understanding is useful in analyzing the communicative properties of dress in the Bible. Copious evidence from ancient Near East to the Roman world and from the OT to the NT illustrates that dress was not only understood to be an important necessity, but also a means of communicating much critical information to others.

The dress of the high priest was powerful in identifying his status and role within the Israelite cultus. This is true despite questions about and difficulty in cataloging, describing, and interpreting the specific ritual dress elements of the high priest. Fluidity in sartorial descriptions of the high priest suggests that metonymy and synecdoche were in play in some of the texts. In addition, this study suggests that high priestly dress should include such elements as bare feet, the censer, and incense, since bare feet are an example of negative dress, a censer can be classified as a dress tool, and incense can be viewed as a dress cosmetic.

Conclusion

This dissertation concludes that the sartorial reference to the *ποδήρης* that the “one like a son of man” wears in Revelation 1, when seen in combination with the reference to him in the midst of the seven golden lampstands (1:12-13), communicates a high priestly identity. The other dress elements (the *ζώνη χρυσᾶν* and the feet like *χαλκολιβάνω*), while contributing in varying degrees to the plausibility of the high priestly imagery in this passage, combine with the *ποδήρης* to substantiate a sartorial ensemble impressively communicative of Jesus’ high priestly identity in John’s inaugural vision in Revelation.

The results of this study suggest at least four important implications for interpreting Revelation and the NT as a whole. First, the electric impact of the dress of the high priest on observers in the Second Temple period is mirrored by the prominent position it holds in John’s inaugural vision in Revelation 1. Second, dress imagery implicitly provides profound Christological information in Revelation, and Christological titles for Jesus in Revelation must not inappropriately shape or restrict the meaning of dress imagery there. Third, high priestly imagery for Jesus in the NT cannot be restricted to the epistle to the Hebrews. And fourth, the overall dress imagery, which is so prevalent throughout Revelation, indicates that it bears more weight for John than many commentators have typically granted it.