

How did the Israelites dress in the Wilderness, when Deuteronomy 22:5 was written?

There are a lot of myths surrounding the way that the Israelites dressed when Deu. 22:5 was written. My experience is that most people assume that the Israelites wore robes. Many seminary graduates and authors of non-scholarly commentaries (I.e., study Bibles, devotional commentaries, etc) will also refer to the Israelites wearing robes.

But what did the Israelites really wear? It seems that people have a vague impression that everyone in ancient times wore robes. Combine that with images of Charlton Heston parting the Red Sea in *The Ten Commandments* and you've got a recipe for myth being repeated as fact.

In this article I will present two citations from [*Nelson's new illustrated Bible manners & customs : How the people of the Bible really lived*](#). This is one of the best reference books available on biblical customs in my opinion.

Citation 1: How the Israelites dressed in Egypt

"Women during the Middle Kingdom [Joseph's time period] and Empire periods [the time of the Exodus] commonly wore a long, white close-fitting dress (a sheath) held up with wide shoulder straps and extending to the ankles. Sometimes they covered their breasts and sometimes they did not. Surviving dresses show that the dresses were more baggy than the artists portray them. During the Empire the sheath dress became an undergarment. Over this, women wore a pleated, fringed robe consisting of a single piece of cloth, gathered around the waist and with the two top corners pulled over the

shoulders and knotted under the breasts. Within this generalization, individuality was achieved with distinctive lines, embroidery, lace, and other decoration.

Servant girls usually wore only a skirt or apron while working. Dancing girls, musicians, singers and young waitresses commonly wore nothing but some jewelry.” ((Vos, H. F. (1999). Nelson’s new illustrated Bible manners & customs : How the people of the Bible really lived (66). Nashville, Tenn.: T. Nelson Publishers.))

Citation 2: How the Israelites dressed in the Wilderness

“As to styles, all we know for certain is the clothing of the priests and the high priest, as described above. The rest of the people would have dressed much as they did while in Egypt. In fact, as noted, they came from Egypt in Egyptian garb. What appears on the subject in the last chapter [the first paragraph that I cited] should be reviewed. Since it is very hot in the Sinai during the day, presumably men often wore only linen kilts and women full-length, light weight, loose-fitting dresses. But it gets cold in the Sinai at night and the people needed something to keep them warm. Therefore it may be assumed that men and women owned long cloaks to wear at night or in high altitudes or to use as a blanket. Cloaks served as blankets at night even in New Testament Palestine.” ((Vos, H. F. (1999). Nelson’s new illustrated Bible manners & customs : How the people of the Bible really lived (103). Nashville, Tenn.: T. Nelson Publishers.))

Closing Comments:

I hope that these citations prove helpful to people who are studying Deu. 22:5 and the meaning of “men’s apparel.” If you are studying the “pants” issue then you might also be

interested in two other articles I have written about this subject:

1. [What does the Bible say about women wearing pants?](#)
2. [Response to UPC Bible study on wearing pants](#)

[Response to UPC Bible study on women wearing pants](#)

*Response to a Bible study written by Rev. M.G. Blankenship.
Found at
<http://www.apostolic.edu/biblestudy/files/bwahprt2.htm>.
Accessed 4/28/2007.*

I am not going to reprint the entire study because it would take too much space. What I will do is show a piece from the Bible study and then respond to it. I do recommend that you read the entire Bible study and form your own conclusions.

Spelling and editing errors in the italicized errors are the mistake of the author of the Bible study that I am responding to. Spelling and editing errors in the rest of the article are my mistake.

Rev. Blankenship writes:

Deut 22:5 "The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment: for all that do so are abomination unto the LORD thy God."

One thing for sure: The "unisex" styles of our day are an abomination to God. It is a perverse hostility to God's creation order! It is driven by spirits that wish to put

humanity into rebellion.

My Response:

Rev. Blankenship starts his Bible study with a critical mistake: He assumes that Deu. 22:5 is talking about cross-dressing. Deuteronomy 22:5 could be talking about cross-dressing, but it is actually a very difficult verse to translate. Scholars are divided on the exact meaning. The careful reader will notice that Deu. 22:5 in the KJV says, "The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment." See the difference?

Literally in the Hebrew it says, "There shall not be the thing of a man on a woman, nor shall a man put on a woman's garment" (LITV). To complicate matters, the Hebrew word used for "garment" actually means the outer cloak that women wore during the day ((John C. Maxwell and Lloyd J. Ogilvie, *The Preacher's Commentary Series, Volume 5 : Deuteronomy, The Preacher's Commentary series* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Inc, 1987). 241.)) and (if they were poor) used as a blanket at night. The word for "garment" can also mean "clothing" in a general sense, so scholars are divided on how it is meant to be used in this passage. They are also divided on what exactly "the thing of a man" refers to.

The Preacher's Commentary lists the four dominant views on this passage, and I will cite them here. I have put the citations in numbered form for easier reading, but I have not changed the wording:

1. "One explanation is that this practice was associated with the religion of Canaan....Apparently women appeared in male garments and men in women's clothes when they worshiped their pagan deities. Yahweh wanted His people to be unique and to do nothing that was in any way connected with foreign religions.

2. Another theory is that this verse could refer to war. A woman was not to put on the trappings of a soldier or dress like a man in order to try to gain admission into the army. Nor were men to attempt to avoid military obligation by dressing as women.
3. Another explanation often given for this ban is that it obscured the distinction between the sexes and therefore violated an essential part of the created order of life (Gen. 1:27). The Hebrew phrase for "pertains to" is used elsewhere in referring to decorations or utensils used by the opposite sex. During the days of Moses, garments worn by men and women were very similar (robes); so this command was designed to keep a woman from appearing as a man for purposes of licentiousness. The major difference between male and female robes was their decoration or ornamentation. This passage does not teach against women's wearing slacks, hats, shoes, gloves, or other items that are now worn by both sexes, but rather against the wearing of any item specifically intended for the opposite sex. The distinctives of each sex should be maintained and protected in regard to outward appearance. The New Testament instruction in Galatians 3:28 that "there is neither male or female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" applied to status in God's sight and not to dress. While we realize that we are one in Christ, recognition of the differences between the sexes is a principle worth safeguarding.
4. Still another explanation is that this verse refers to the practice of transvestism, a deviant form of sexual behavior which is often characterized by cross-dressing. The verse says women should not wear things "pertaining to" the male. This phrase includes not only clothing, but also ornaments, weapons, and other items normally associated with men. In the second clause, women's clothing is explicitly forbidden men ((Ibid.)."

These four explanations, while lengthy, serve to illustrate

the fact that the translation of Deuteronomy 22:5 is highly debatable. The mistake that Rev. Blankenship makes is that he assumes that it must be talking about cross-dressing (he doesn't even acknowledge the possibility of any other interpretation), and then he leaps to the conclusion that anything that could be considered "unisexual" is an "abomination."

Rev. Blankenship writes:

Men & Women are different: Both Physically & Emotionally by creation. And God has placed certain social methods into place to maintain this difference. To guard against homosexuality & the decline of the family. Today we have women that look masculine & men that look feminine.

I Cor 6:9 "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, "-> (webster's: unsuitably womanish)

My Response:

First, I agree with Rev. Blankenship that acts of homosexuality are sin (cf. Rom. 1:26-27; 1 Tim. 1:10). Unfortunately, Rev. Blankenship makes two tremendous errors when he jumps from Deu. 22:5 to the subject of homosexuality. First, he is still assuming that Deu. 22:5 is talking about cross-dressing, when the meaning of the Scripture is debated. Second, he assumes that anyone who cross-dresses must be a homosexual! Anyone who has basic training in sexual deviancy knows that cross-dressing is not always (or even often) associated with homosexuality. I'm not an expert in this area, though, so I'll quote the experts:

[Transvestitism is the] practice of wearing the clothes of the opposite sex (cross-dressing), generally to derive some kind of sexual pleasure. It is often mistakenly associated

with homosexuality; in fact, however, transvestites may be either heterosexual or homosexual, and the practice of cross-dressing is sometimes even ridiculed among homosexuals. The transvestite must also be distinguished from the transsexual, who desires to become a functioning member of the opposite sex; most transvestites are men who comfortably fill male roles in society and are satisfied with their biological sex. Transsexuals, both male and female, are uncomfortable with their sex and are usually required to cross-dress for an extended period before they undergo surgery. That most transvestites are men is at least in part a result of the role of fashion in Western culture; in the mid-to-late 20th century Western women wearing trousers and other clothes once considered to be exclusively men's clothes are not seen as deviant ("transvestism." Encyclopædia Britannica. 2007. Encyclopædia Britannica Online. 28 Apr. 2007)).

So the mistake that Rev. Blankenship makes here is that he continues his line of faulty reasoning. He first claimed that Deu. 22:5 must be talking about cross-dressing, so his conclusion was that "the 'unisex' styles of our day are an abomination to God." He then goes on to assume that anyone who engages in cross-dressing is a homosexual. While I agree with Rev. Blankenship that cross-dressing for the purpose of deriving sexual pleasure is a sin, I find it ridiculous to assume that anyone who wears an article of unisex clothing (such a woman wearing slacks) is a homosexual. The very idea is absurd! If that's the case then either men or women are being an abomination to God every time that they wear any of these articles of clothing:

- Jackets (don't most coats and jackets look the same for men and women?)
- Shoes (do men and women need to have separate shoe styles so that they won't be considered unisex?)
- Watches (many men's dress watches look like women's watches, and vice versa)

- Glasses (shouldn't we have glasses that are designed specifically for men and women? I'd hate for someone to look at my shades and think that I was a transvestite)
- Isn't this kind of absurd?

The point here is that the UPC has taken slacks and created a huge issue out of them, and left every other article of clothing on the sidelines. If the UPC would apply their rules consistently then I could respect their views, even though I disagree with them. But when I see UPC pastors preach against women wearing slacks from the pulpit, and then I go visit them in their homes and see their wives and daughters walking around in pajama pants, then I see hypocrisy, not holiness.

Rev. Blankenship writes:

[Rev. Blankenship spends the next few paragraphs in his study arguing that Deuteronomy is part of the moral law of God, not the ceremonial law. I am not going to discuss that here for two reasons: 1) As I have already said, the translation of Deu. 22:5 is debated, so until we know exactly what God was talking about then it's pointless to discuss whether the law was moral or ceremonial; and 2) If Deu. 22:5 is talking about transvestitism (cross-dressing for sexual pleasure or other deviant reasons) then I agree with him that it is against the moral law, however, that does not lead to the conclusion that it is wrong for women to wear slacks today. Even if Deu. 22:5 is talking about transvestitism, and even if it is a moral law that still applies to us today, I still do not think that slacks are "men's apparel." Also, we have to remember that the prohibition in Deu. 22:5 was against any article that could apply to a man, so if it is a moral law that still applies to us today then we have to create a whole list of things that women cannot wear (I.e., their husband's t-shirt, their husband's tools (those are traditionally men's items), etc.).]

Rev. Blankenship writes:

I Peter 3:5 "For after this manner in the old time the holy

women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands:"

THE POINT: << HOLY WOMEN OF OLD LIVED BY DEUT 22:5>>

My Response:

1 Pet. 3:6 uses Sarah as an example of a "holy woman." She lived over 600 years before Deuteronomy 22:5 was written, so it is obvious that Peter's point was not that "holy women of old lived by Deut 22:5." To see his point we must back up to 1 Pet. 3:1 and read the entire passage:

1Pe 3:1-6 NASB

(1) In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if [any of them] are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives,

(2) as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior.

(3) Your adornment must not be [merely] external—braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses;

(4) but [let it be] the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God.

(5) For in this way in former times the holy women also, who hoped in God, used to adorn themselves, being submissive to their own husbands;

(6) just as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, and you have become her children if you do what is right without being frightened by any fear.

The focus in the above passage is on inward holiness, not outward appearance. If Peter is talking about outward appearance in this passage then he is saying that women cannot braid their hair or wear dresses. He is obviously not saying that—his point is clearly that a woman's focus should be on inward holiness, not on impressing people with her outward

appearance. (This applies to men as well.)

Rev. Blankenship writes:

NOW TO PRACTICAL APPLICATION

Part of our DAILY attire should be for gender distinction. Unmistakable, visual, identification of the sexes.

IN OUR CULTURE:— (which is all we need to worry about)

Man's attire: = pants, trousers, slacks

My Response:

Again, I agree with Rev. Blankenship that a person should not deliberately try to appear like they are of the opposite sex (cross-dressing). However, I strongly disagree with him that pants, trousers, and slacks are not women's attire. Has he looked around lately? Pants on women are completely acceptable in Western culture. The fact is that styles and apparel change with time.

Rev. Blankenship writes:

EVEN THE PICTURES ON PUBLIC REST ROOMS TELLS THIS CULTURAL TRUTH. This could even change from culture to culture but Deut 22 covers ALL CULTURES! and all times.

My Response:

I'm not sure what point Rev. Blankenship is trying to make here. In the same paragraph he says that apparel can change from culture to culture and that Deu. 22:5 covers all cultures. If he is admitting that men and women's apparel changes from culture to culture, then why does he have such a problem with women wearing slacks? 100 years ago women did not wear slacks, now they do. Big deal! Culture changed! If he admits that dress codes change over time and from culture to culture (which they obviously do) then I don't see why he has such a problem with women wearing slacks.

Rev. Blankenship writes:

"Pertaineth to" = things traditionally associated with, or patterned after a man. (slacks have indeed been masculine in our culture)

My Response:

So have any number of other things. That's what makes Deu. 22:5 so difficult to translate. No one alive today is sure exactly what Moses meant when he wrote that a woman should not put on that which "pertaineth to a man." My point is that we should not limit Deu. 22:5 to clothing. If we're going to say that it is applicable today then we need to come up with a definitive list of things that "pertaineth to a man," and then we need to forbid Christian women to use those things.

Rev. Blankenship writes:

Historically: WWII factories were the first time slacks started being worn by women. At the same time: short hair, cigarettes, swearing became acceptable feminine behavior. Now that path has come to Abortion, Divorce, Single Parent homes, extreme feminism: You've come a long way baby??

My Response:

I don't mean to be sarcastic, but I'm not sure I follow the connection between women wearing slacks and abortion, divorce, single parent homes, and extreme feminism. I'm not a sociologist, but I'd be willing to take a stab in the dark and guess that sociologists would identify more causes for these things than women wearing slacks.

Rev. Blankenship writes:

Two things should always govern your decisions:

*GOOD TASTE & COMMON SENSE == R e m e m b e r i n g * w h o * y o u * a r e !*

God visibly separated Israel: food /dress /farming /worship

/Sabbath.. You could tell a Jew by his dress/Actions. The Jews survived 1,900 years without a home land. It's the only existing ancient culture! GOD'S LAWS PRESERVED THEIR IDENTITY! God wants to preserve His church in this day in the same manner!

-->>> Outer actions bring a GREATER CHRISTIAN COMMITMENT in your life!

My Response:

There are several things that must be said about the comments that Rev. Blankenship made in the preceding paragraph.

First, God did visibly separate Israel in dress, farming, worship, and the Sabbath. It was called the Mosaic Law, and Jesus fulfilled it. When Rev. Blankenship says that "God wants to preserve His church in this day in the same manner" he is saying the exact opposite of what God wants to do! The whole point of Jesus coming was to set us free from slavery to sin (cf. Rom. 6) and to the Mosaic Law (cf. Gal. 4-5).

Second, the Jews are not the only ancient culture that is still around today. Take a look at Japan, India, Nepal, China, Sri Lanka, and almost any Middle Eastern nation for an example of an ancient culture that still exists.

Third, Rev. Blankenship's statement that "Outer actions bring a GREATER CHRISTIAN COMMITMENT in your life" could not be farther from the truth! If anything, external rules and regulations push us farther away from God, not closer to Him! In the book of Galatians Paul is writing to a church that was starting to return to the Mosaic Law. One of the things that they were returning to was the practice of demanding that people be circumcised. Did Paul commend them, saying that "Outer actions bring a greater Christian commitment in [their] life"? Far from it! Paul actually told them, "You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by the law; you have fallen from grace" (Gal. 5:4).

Wow! That's some pretty harsh language! It seems that a return to the Mosaic Law is the exact opposite of what God wants us to do! This does not mean that a Christian can just do whatever they want, of course, because Paul also wrote that we are set free from slavery to sin so that we can be slaves to righteousness (Rom. 6). The point is that we were set free from the Mosaic Law and that God "wrote His laws upon our heart" (cf. Heb. 8:10; 10:16). Now we are able to have direct communication with Him and directly know what is pleasing to Him and what is not. What a beautiful concept!

Rev. Blankenship writes:

Even Joan Rivers (on her syndicated talk show) stated "Everybody knows women wear dresses and men wear pants.". If worldly people know it to be a simple truth, we does God's church act so stubborn about it?

My Response:

I looked for the Joan Rivers quote but was unable to find it. If anyone can verify that she actually said that then please [let me know](#). Even if she did say that it makes no difference. Joan Rivers is one of the last people that I would listen to when deciding what is pleasing to God and what is not.

Rev. Blankenship writes:

Let us remember who we are and be proud to carry his banner in these last days!

My Response:

I'm incredibly proud of who I am. I am a child of the King, and I want everyone to know it! That's why I now wear a necklace with a cross on it! (I don't wear dresses though, just in case anyone is wondering.)

Isaiah 47:2 (Misinterpreted Scriptures)

Take the millstones, and grind meal: uncover thy locks, make bare the leg, uncover the thigh, pass over the rivers.

Misinterpretation: The UPC often uses this Scripture to try to prove that it is wrong for men to wear shorts or for women to wear skirts above the knee.

Facts: If this Scripture is teaching that men cannot wear shorts then it is also teaching that women cannot remove their veils. Let's take a closer look at the Scripture to see what I mean.

To understand this Scripture we must look at what the phrase "uncover thy locks" means. "Uncover thy locks" means "remove the veil." Here is how several mainstream English translations render Is. 47:2 (I have included Young's Literal Translation, since many UPC pastors use this translation for study):

Isa 47:2 YLT (Young's Literal Translation)

Take millstones, and grind flour, Remove thy veil, draw up the skirt, Uncover the leg, pass over the floods.

Isa 47:2 NASB

Take the millstones and grind meal. Remove your veil, strip off the skirt, Uncover the leg, cross the rivers.

Isa 47:2 ESV

Take the millstones and grind flour, put off your veil, strip off your robe, uncover your legs, pass through the rivers.

Isa 47:2 GNB

*Turn the millstone! Grind the flour! Off with your veil!
Strip off your fine clothes! Lift up your skirts to cross the
streams!*

*Isa 47:2 JPS (Jewish Translation of the Old Testament)
Take the millstones, and grind meal; remove thy veil, strip
off the train, uncover the leg, pass through the rivers.*

I included these five mainstream English translations because I want to show that the common rendering of the verse is "remove your veil," and that it is not a translation that I came up with on my own. My point is this: If this verse proves that it is immodest for a person to wear shorts or skirts above the knee then it also proves that it is immodest for women to remove their veils.

What does the Bible say about women wearing pants?

The first thing that we must understand when asking this question is that no one in the Bible wore pants. They did not exist back then—at least not in the form we have them today. Because of this, the Bible never dealt with the subject of women wearing pants. [Note: I have added [an article on what the Israelites did wear when they were in Egypt and during the Exodus](#).] The Mosaic Law does, however, deal with the subject of cross-dressing. The Mosaic Law says, "A woman shall not wear man's clothing, nor shall a man put on a woman's clothing; for whoever does these things is an abomination to the LORD your God" (Deut. 22:5 NASB). The argument against women wearing pants that I always heard when I was in the UPC was this:

1. Deut. 22:5 applies to us today. Even though we are not under the Mosaic Law anymore, something that is an abomination to God is always an abomination. (This is based off of Rev. 21:27, which says that "no one who practices abomination" (KJV) will enter into the New Jerusalem.)
2. Since pants are men's apparel, and dresses are women's apparel, it is an abomination for a woman to wear pants or for a man to wear dresses.

Notice that I said that this is the argument that I heard during my time in the UPC. It is only fair to say that the official position paper of the UPC uses a different line of reasoning. They say, "[W]e should avoid...slacks on women because they immodestly reveal the feminine contours of upper leg, thigh, and hip ((United Pentecostal Church International, [Position Paper on Modesty](#), Accessed 2006-12-30 21:10:16))."

In this article I am going to take a look at both views, and then I'll wrap up with an important point about hypocrisy.

Edit (1/2/07): I found [another position paper](#) from the UPCI on men and women's apparel. In this other paper they do use a modified form of the Deut. 22:5 argument.

Are Slacks Automatically Immodest?

I think that it is ridiculous to say that slacks are inherently more immodest than dresses. Slacks and dresses can be immodest. It is possible that pants on a woman would have been considered immodest 200 years ago in many Western societies, but that's pure conjecture. Either way, I know of no man in Western culture who is automatically thrown into temptation because a woman wears pants. What we have to deal with is what is modest today, not what was modest 200 years ago or 2,000 years ago. The Bible never defined modesty, it only told us to be modest.

Are Pants "Men's Apparel"?

I do not think that pants can be thought of as only men's apparel in modern Western culture. Cultures and dress codes change over time. They always have. When Deut. 22:5 was written men were probably wearing linen kilts and women were probably wearing "full-length, light weight, loose-fitting dresses ((Nelson's Bible Manners & Customs: How the People of the Bible Really Lived, "5.2 The People of God Wandering In the Wilderness", ed. Howard F. Vos))." In the mid-19th century men were wearing breeches and women were wearing dresses that did not show even their ankles. Yet now the dress code laid by the UPC is that women have to wear dresses but they can come up to the knee ((United Pentecostal Church International, [Position Paper on Modesty](#), Accessed 2006-12-30 21:10:16)). Why did they choose this style of apparel and not the style that was worn when Deut. 22:5 was written, or the style that was worn in the 19th century? The reason is that cultures and styles change, and the UPC apparently picked the style of apparel that happened to be in fashion when their doctrines started to develop.

There is no biblical excuse for taking a girl who is a third-generation wearer of pants and telling her that she has to only wear dresses. At some point we have to admit that culture has changed. Again, we're concerned with what culture is now, not what it was in the 1800s and early 1900s.

Hypocrisy? The Pants Issue Can Be One Way or the Other, It Can't Be Both

Let me talk to the preachers and teachers for a moment.

Many preachers and teachers in the UPC feel that Deut. 22:5 still applies to us today. I don't take that view, but I'm not going to debate the point. What I will say is that if you are going to apply Deut. 22:5 to the pants vs. skirts debate then you have to apply it to everything. If you believe that it is

an abomination for a woman to wear pants (because you feel that pants are men's apparel) then you must be willing to make a complete prohibition against women wearing men's apparel. For instance, many women in the UPC wear pajama pants but they will not wear pants in public. If pants are men's apparel, and if it's a sin for women to wear men's apparel, then that means no pajama pants. It also means that a girl can't put on her boyfriend's jacket or her husband's shirt, or any other article of clothing that is designed for a man.

It can be one way or the other, it can't be both. It must be a complete prohibition or no prohibition at all. To preach against women wearing pants, and then allow your wife to wear pajama pants, is nothing less than total hypocrisy. If you do preach a complete prohibition against women wearing any men's apparel then I will respect your view, even though I will continue to disagree with it. If you will not do that then I view your teaching as hypocritical in the extreme.

Conclusion

It is not safe to end this subject without pointing out that cross-dressing is almost definitely displeasing to God. When I say "cross-dressing" this is the usage that I am referring to:

Nearly every society throughout history has had a set of norms, views, guidelines, or laws regarding the wearing of clothing and what is appropriate for each gender. Cross-dressing is a behavior which runs counter to those norms ((Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, [Cross-dressing](#), Accessed 2006-12-30 23:20:05)).

I do think that we can extrapolate from Scripture that God would be displeased with someone deliberately dressing in a manner that identifies them with the opposite gender. However, I do not think that a woman wearing pants should be considered cross-dressing. As I said before, women wearing pants is part

of the accepted norm in modern Western culture.

What does the Bible say about men wearing shorts?

Many churches in the UPC teach that men should not wear shorts. In my experience the only Scriptural backing that is given for this doctrine is this Scripture passage:

Isa 47:1-3 KJV

(1) Come down, and sit in the dust, O virgin daughter of Babylon, sit on the ground: there is no throne, O daughter of the Chaldeans: for thou shalt no more be called tender and delicate.

(2) Take the millstones, and grind meal: uncover thy locks, make bare the leg, uncover the thigh, pass over the rivers.

(3) Thy nakedness shall be uncovered, yea, thy shame shall be seen: I will take vengeance, and I will not meet thee as a man.

I have already discussed this passage in my article on [Misinterpreted Scriptures](#), so in this article I am simply going to repeat the material that I have already written in that article:

Misinterpretation: The UPC often uses this Scripture to try to prove that it is wrong for men to wear shorts or for women to wear skirts above the knee.

Facts: If this Scripture is teaching that men cannot wear shorts then it is also teaching that women cannot remove their veils. Let's take a closer look at the Scripture to see what I

mean.

To understand this Scripture we must look at what the phrase "uncover thy locks" means. "Uncover thy locks" means "remove the veil." Here is how several mainstream English translations render Isa. 47:2 (I have included Young's Literal Translation, since many UPC pastors use this translation for study):

Isa 47:2 YLT (Young's Literal Translation)

(2) Take millstones, and grind flour, Remove thy veil, draw up the skirt, Uncover the leg, pass over the floods.

Isa 47:2 NASB

(2) "Take the millstones and grind meal. Remove your veil, strip off the skirt, Uncover the leg, cross the rivers.

Isa 47:2 ESV

(2) Take the millstones and grind flour, put off your veil, strip off your robe, uncover your legs, pass through the rivers.

Isa 47:2 GNB

(2) Turn the millstone! Grind the flour! Off with your veil! Strip off your fine clothes! Lift up your skirts to cross the streams!

Isa 47:2 JPS (Jewish Translation of the Old Testament)

(2) Take the millstones, and grind meal; remove thy veil, strip off the train, uncover the leg, pass through the rivers.

I included these five mainstream English translations because I want to show that the common rendering of the verse is "remove your veil," and that it is not a translation that I came up with on my own. My point is this: If this verse proves that it is immodest for a person to wear shorts or skirts above the knee then it also proves that it is immodest for women to remove their veils.

It is clear that there is no basis for using this Scripture to try to prove that shorts are immodest on men or women. The UPC teaching that says that men should not wear shorts is a great example of the common UPC practice of pulling one Scripture out of context and using it to create a doctrine that it was never meant to teach. The simple fact of the matter is that the Bible never even hints that shorts are immodest on men or women.