

John 19:23

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took his garments, and made four parts, to every soldier a part; and also his coat: now the coat was without seam, woven from the top throughout.

Analysis

Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took his garments, and made four parts, to every soldier a part; and also his coat: now the coat was without seam, woven from the top throughout. Roman crucifixion squads (quaternions of four soldiers) customarily claimed the victim's clothing as spoils. The division into four parts—one per soldier—fulfills this practice.

The detail about Jesus's chiton (χιτών)—the inner garment—being ἄραφος (araphos, seamless) and ὑφαντὸς ἐκ τῶν ἄνωθεν (hyphantos ek tōn anōthen, woven from the top throughout) has sparked theological reflection for centuries. The high priest's robe was similarly seamless (Josephus, Antiquities 3.161), suggesting Jesus's priestly office. Hebrews 4:14 calls Him our 'great high priest' who passed through the heavens.

The seamless garment also symbolizes Christ's undivided wholeness—His perfect unity and integrity. Unlike the divided garments (representing perhaps His distributed ministry through the church), the seamless robe that cannot be divided without destroying it represents His indivisible person and work. Attempts to fragment Christ—separating His humanity from divinity, His teaching from His atoning work, His lordship from His saviorhood—destroy the gospel itself.

Historical Context

Roman soldiers were poorly paid, making crucifixion victims' garments a valued perk. A seamless tunic woven from top to bottom was relatively expensive, requiring a special vertical loom. Most tunics had seams. Archaeological finds confirm that seamless garments were worn by priests and wealthy individuals.

John, writing perhaps 60 years after these events, includes precise details that authenticate eyewitness testimony. The mention of four soldiers matches Roman military procedure—crucifixion squads were quaternions. The distinction between the divided outer garments and the seamless inner tunic shows careful observation.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. How does the symbolism of Jesus as the true High Priest reframe our understanding of His crucifixion?
2. What does the seamless robe's indivisibility teach about the unity and wholeness of Christ's person and work?
3. In what ways might modern Christianity 'divide the garments'—fragmenting Jesus into acceptable and unacceptable parts?

Interlinear Text

Οἱ οὖν στρατιώτῃ ὅτε ἐσταύρωσαν τὸν Ἰησοῦν ἔλαβον
G3588 **Then** **soldier** **when** **they had crucified** G3588 **Jesus** **took**
G3767 G4757 G3753 G4717 G2424 G2983

τὰ ἱμάτια αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐποίησαν τέσσαρα μέρος ἐκάστῳ
G3588 **garments** **his** **and** **made** **four** **a part** **to every**
G2440 G846 G2532 G4160 G5064 G3313 G1538

στρατιώτῃ μέρος καὶ τὸν χιτῶν ἦν δὲ ὁ χιτῶν
soldier **a part** **and** G3588 **his coat** **was** **now** G3588 **his coat**
G4757 G3313 G2532 G5509 G2258 G1161 G5509

ἄρραφος, ἐκ τῶν ἄνωθεν ὑφαντὸς δι' ὅλου
without seam **from** G3588 **the top** **woven** **throughout** G3650
G729 G1537 G509 G5307 G1223

Additional Cross-References

Luke 23:34 (References Jesus): Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots.

Mark 15:24 (Cross): And when they had crucified him, they parted his garments, casting lots upon them, what every man should take.

Matthew 27:35 (Cross): And they crucified him, and parted his garments, casting lots: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots.