



The Law given through Moses*

26. Cloths and garments

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THE QUESTION has been raised as to why a cloth of scarlet should have been used to cover the table of shewbread, and the implements connected therewith (Num. 4:7,8). It has been suggested that this does not harmonise with the idea expressed in these pages that scarlet was representative of human nature. A further objection offered was that scarlet was not the only colour mentioned as emblematic of sin in Isaiah 1, and white is not the only symbol of righteousness.

To deal with the latter objection first, it is to be feared that the parallelism of Hebrew poetry has once again been taken as a basis for unprofitable hair-splitting. The whiteness of snow is certainly more intense than that of clean wool, but both are white and both are fitting symbols of purity. As for the appropriate colour to represent mortal nature, we may ask, Is blood red, or scarlet, or crimson? Surely the question is frivolous. Even an artist, used to drawing the finest distinctions between varying shades of colour, unless he was trying to force objections to the words of Scripture, would freely admit that our blood is always red, while in different conditions the exact shade might best be described either as crimson or scarlet. There cannot be any reasonable doubt that red represents mortal human nature; and white, whether the whiteness of snow or washed wool, or of fine linen, represents righteousness. "The fine linen is the righteousness of saints" (Rev. 19:8).

The other point regarding the cloths of service is of far greater interest; but really, instead of being an objection, it is a remarkable confirmation of the exposition offered in these pages. We are informed in the fourth chapter of Numbers that the sons of Kohath were to have the important work of taking down the holy things of the tabernacle and wrapping them up in readiness for moving the camp. The general instructions

were to use cloths of blue for covering, with badgers' skins above.

As all the holy things were symbols of gifts from heaven, the blue cloth is strongly suggestive of the interpretation we have offered. In a sunny land with the great expanse of the sky above, blue would be a continual reminder that the Law with all its ritual was not from the earth but from heaven. So blue cloths were used to cover the emblems. Skins of animals would obviously give more protection and may have been ordered partly with this utilitarian object, but if we are right in thinking of the skins as representing the framework of nature in which the Law operated, there was also a symbolic appropriateness in such skins being used for covering.

In studying the details we find two remarkable exceptions. The ark was to be covered with the veil, then came the protecting skins, and on the top of these they were to spread a cloth wholly of blue. With all the other emblems the blue came first and the skins were the outside covering. Surely the object of this exception was to concentrate attention on the ark, when the people were on the march. Other emblems were covered with dark skins, but the ark, the central symbol of their religion, shone out with the blue of heaven.

The other exception—the one particularly mentioned by our correspondent—concerns the table of shewbread. Here a cloth of blue was spread on the table. All its appliances and the shewbread were then placed on the blue cloth and a scarlet cloth was spread over the top. Then came the covering of skin. The critic asks, Why should this table of shewbread be the only one of the holy things to be covered with a scarlet cloth, if this colour represented mortal human nature?

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Surely the answer is on the surface. The shewbread—twelve cakes (Lev. 24:5,6)—represented the nation. This bread, continually renewed, was the most obvious symbol of mortal human nature. It represented the nation, truly carried by God and accounted holy, but still human, still perishing and needing continual renewal. As a symbol, it was the opposite of the tables of testimony which were kept behind the veil. Those tables were enduring, written with the finger of God, with words of life finally to be written on the hearts of those who will attain to the most holy. The twelve cakes of bread, renewed from day to day, spoke of weak human nature, lasting for only a little while. The scarlet cloth was most appropriate as a covering.

SOME difficulty may be experienced in understanding the instruction regarding priestly robes and priestly duties. The robe worn by the high priest when he was officiating was very ornate. On the great Day of Atonement, however, when he entered the most holy, he was not dressed in his resplendent robe but in garments of pure white linen. In Leviticus 16 we read: “these are holy garments; therefore shall he wash his flesh in water, and so put them on” (v. 4). This can be understood without difficulty while we remember that the fine linen was emblematic of righteousness. On the Day of Atonement, Aaron was a type of the Great High Priest who has set aside the condemning ordinances of the Law and, by his perfect righteousness, has opened the way of life.

But what of the bells attached to the hem of the high priest’s robe—bells of such importance that they were essential for life (Ex. 28:35)? We do not read of bells on the linen garments worn on the Day of Atonement. It seems therefore that the bells were not heard on the occasion of the priest’s actual entry of the most holy.

Another difficulty arises from a comparison of Exodus with apostolic comment in connection with the golden altar of incense. The instruction in Exodus seems clearly to place it before the veil, and this was the custom in Israel. The apostle in writing to the Hebrews says: “And after the second veil, the tabernacle which is called the Holiest of all; which had the golden censer, and the ark of the covenant” (9:3,4). On the basis of manuscripts in the Vatican some translators have changed the order of the words, placing the golden censer with the lamp and the table of shewbread before the reference to the second

veil. Some students follow this reading as removing a difficulty and bringing the words of the apostle into harmony with the Mosaic account.

If the original reading of this passage in Hebrews 9 admitted of this rendering, it seems strange that such a change should chance to arise in transcription. We may raise the question as to whether this is one of those matters in which there is a purposeful ambiguity—not a statement that the golden censer was in the most holy place, but that the most holy had the censer as part of its equipment. A concentration of attention on symbolic meaning may assist our understanding.

We cannot suppose that the sound of the bells when the high priest drew near was necessary to inform the angel of his presence. The warning “that he die not” did not mean that apart from the sound of the bells he might be slain in mistake for an unlawful intruder. The messenger of God would know that the priest was there, quite apart from any sound that he might make. The importance of the bells in preserving his life was in the matter of faith and obedience, always necessary if we are to escape from the death to which we all stand related. It is certain that the golden altar of incense was close to the veil; and so, every day, when the priest kindled the fire, he would be very near to the most holy and the bells would be heard. When he passed beyond the veil on the Day of Atonement, the cloud of incense would go with him, but as he would be attired in the garment of pure linen and his robe would be laid aside, the bells would not be heard.

We know from the plain testimony of Scripture what was represented by the veil. We are equally clear regarding the incense of prayer and the pure linen garments. Can we not also see a meaning in the golden bells? It seems reasonable to take them as symbolising the active deeds of righteousness, especially in the proclamation of the gospel by servants of God whose “sound went into all the earth” (Rom. 10:18).

So the Great High Priest in the “glory and beauty” of his life was continually engaged in the work of God. It was his meat and drink to do the will of the Father Who had sent him. Every day he was near the most holy, offering the incense of prayer, while deeds of faith and obedience were as incessant as the ringing of the golden bells. The good works on earth only ceased when he was finally clad in the garment of perfect righteousness, when his pre-sacrificial work was “finished” (Jno. 17:4), and, with the perfection of

prayer, he passed through the veil into the most holy.

The type fits perfectly; and, when we concentrate attention on hidden meanings, the apostolic reference to the golden censer can be understood even as it appears in the Authorised Version. The altar of incense was normally kept before the veil, but it belonged to that which was beyond. The incense of prayer does not take men through the veil, but it brings them very near. Now that Christ has passed through the veil, and with the records of the faithful hidden with him in heaven (Col. 3:3), it has become true in the full sense of the antitype that ark and mercy seat and golden censer are all in the most holy.

THERE are some matters of interest in connection with the garments of the high priest, especially in the matter of the ephod. The general appearance of the ceremonial robe, "for glory and for beauty", may best be appreciated by examining some of the carefully prepared coloured illustrations which no doubt readers have seen. Such pictures will be helpful in giving some idea of the garments to young students who are anxious to learn, while supplying scholars who claim particular knowledge with a good basis for their criticisms.

The ephod presents a more difficult problem, in which all who are interested may find ample scope for study. The ephod was a garment which fitted over the shoulders, the two shoulder pieces being joined together, and with an embroidered girdle passing round the waist. Attached to the shoulder pieces was the breastplate, in which twelve precious stones were fixed—the Urim and Thummim of such especial significance. There were other ephods for priests of a lower order. In later times it is evident that there were many such garments, for in 1 Samuel 22 we read that Doeg, in his murder of the priests, slew "four-score and five persons that did wear a linen ephod" (v. 18). Samuel as a child wore an ephod, and in later times David, although he was not of the priestly tribe, was "girded with a linen ephod" when the ark was brought to Jerusalem (2 Sam. 6:14).

It may be assumed that there was only one ephod equipped with the twelve precious stones, and that was for the high priest alone. It is certain that the ephod was used for inquiring of the Lord, and that sometimes definite answers were given to specific questions. The Jewish tradition

appears to be that the answers were given by the glow of the stones. When they revealed their full light, a project would be successful; but when they were dull, the answer was negative.

Readers will remember, however, that some of the questions could not be answered so simply, and some students may well ask whether there were any stones in the ephod used for inquiry by David. In his exile David wanted to know whether he was safe to remain in Keilah, or whether, if he stayed there, Saul would come after him. He was told that Saul would come. Then came the question whether, in that event, the men of Keilah would deliver him to the wrath of the king, and the answer was that they would. This surely suggests something more than the negative of the stones not revealing their light.

Here is an interesting problem. It is clear that there was a connection between the priestly ephod and these specific questions. We are informed that Abiathar the son of Ahimelech escaped from the massacre of the priests, that he fled to join David in Keilah, and "he came down with an ephod in his hand" (1 Sam. 23:6). Immediately afterwards these questions were put and the answers given. Previous to the arrival of Abiathar with an ephod we do not read of David making such specific inquiries. Later, at a time of great trouble, as related in chapter 30, David said to Abiathar: "I pray thee, bring me hither the ephod" (v. 7). The ephod was brought and a specific question was put and answered. David was told to pursue after the marauding Amalekites, that he would overtake them and recover all that they had stolen.

ON the other hand, we read in chapter 28 that God gave no answer to Saul, neither by dream, nor by Urim, nor by prophet. Where was the high priest's ephod with the Urim and Thummim? Had the precious stones been taken away when the priests were murdered? It is not possible to give a definite answer to this question, but we may suggest that, again, light may be found along the line of investigation into hidden meanings. It seems very probable that the precious stones were lost in some of those turbulent times in which so little respect was shown to Divine things. The last and perhaps the most interesting reference to the Urim and Thummim in the Scriptures seems clearly to indicate that the glory had departed. In Nehemiah 7:63-65 we read of some priests who could not trace their genealogy, and the Tirshatha told them that they should

not eat of holy things until there stood up a priest with Urim and Thummim.

Was there an element of real-life allegory in the experience of David and Abiathar?—a blending of the kingly and priestly offices in exile, answers from God coming to them, while the Divine presence had definitely departed from the rulers of Israel? Certain it is that the two

offices have now been combined, for the Lord Jesus is both King and Priest although absent, and rejected by the people of Israel, from whom God's face is hidden (Isa. 8:17). Soon the Lord will return with the light and perfection of immortal nature, to take to himself his Kingdom, and with unerring power of judgement to determine who shall be permitted to eat of holy things.



Principles, Preaching and Problems

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Satan and devil revisited

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DURING THE seventy years' captivity in Babylon, and in the centuries following, Judaism became contaminated with pagan dualism, which taught that there were two rival gods, a god of good and a god of evil, who were constantly at war with each other. But the evidence of the Dead Sea Scrolls suggests that the Jews never abandoned their deep-seated monotheism; so, although they accepted the existence of a conflict between a spirit or angel of light and a spirit or angel of darkness, they believed that both were subject to the control of God, and that the spirit of evil, variously called *Diabolos* (maligner), *Satan* (adversary), *Ponos* (wicked one) or *Baalzebub*, would eventually be destroyed by God.

It is evident that by New Testament times there was a general acceptance that physical or mental ailments were attributable to an evil spirit or its agents. Thus in Acts 10:38 we are told that Jesus "went about . . . healing all that were oppressed of the devil [*diabolos*]". After Jesus had healed a bent woman on the sabbath, he answered his critics: "ought not this woman . . . whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the sabbath day?" (Lk. 13:16). Paul referred to a "thorn in the flesh" as "the messenger of Satan to buffet me" (2 Cor. 12:7). Disorders such as dumbness, epilepsy and mental illness, for which there were no obvious visible causes, were attributed to demons controlled by "Beelzebub the prince of the devils [*daimonia*, demons]" (Mt. 12:24). Jesus and his

apostles spoke in the Aramaic language of their day, so we should not be surprised that they used contemporary idioms. This no more implied that they accepted the pagan dualism behind these idioms than we imply a belief in demonology when we use terms such as 'devil's advocate' or 'pandemonium'.

Jesus and his apostles often used *satan* and *diabolos* to represent human opposition to the will of God, especially to the spread of the gospel. This special use of *satan* and *diabolos* was an extension of their common use to account for illnesses which opposed human welfare. The purpose of this study is to show that Satan and the devil do not stand for sins caused by human weakness, but rather for sins of human wickedness which oppose the authority of God's word.

The parable of the sower

We begin with this parable because this first prompted me to look again at Satan and the devil. In this parable we have four responses to the sowing of God's word in the minds of men. Seed which falls on the hard path is immediately snatched away by birds, which represent "the wicked one" (Mt. 13:19), "Satan" (Mk. 4:15) or "the devil" (Lk. 8:12), who, as Jesus explains in the Luke verse, "taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved". Satan and the devil represent those who reject God's word.

By contrast, in both the shallow soil and the weedy soil the seed is accepted and is able to