

their inheritance, and this incident is recorded three times. Their lineage was from Joseph, and it is rather lovely that Mary married another Joseph, who had all the necessary credentials, coming through David's son Nathan, a name which means 'to give'. All this comes together in Ezekiel's great prophecy of the overturning of the throne of Judah, which is to be given to the Lord Jesus, the one "whose right it is" (21:26,27). Mary picks this up in her song, "He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree" (Lk. 1:52), where she uses a play on the meaning of her name, 'exalted', the

Lord having exalted her in place of the wicked prince of Judah.

Lastly, we come back to the lineage as recorded by Matthew. It has within it the names of four righteous women, who, because through faith and obedience they believed in the covenants of promise, were prepared to sacrifice their lives to gain a godly seed. There can be only one reason for their inclusion: that Mary is the fifth, that by grace she was to do the same. She was to be the Lord's handmaid so that all generations could call her blessed (Lk. 1:48).



## Encounter

*Reprinted items from earlier issues, chosen by the Publishing Editor*

# The Law given through Moses

## 21. The curtains and veils\*

Islip Collyer

**I**N A [FORMER article](#)<sup>1</sup> we quoted the main features of Israel's camp, in imagination passing through the spacious outer court, through the first veil of the tabernacle and to the door of the most holy. Now we must again take note of these matters, raising the question as to their meaning.

If there had been nothing more than those walls of linen surrounding the outer court, men of sceptical tendency might have supposed that they were merely a screen to prevent prying eyes from observing the priestly ceremonial. When a student takes note of all the details, it becomes clear that there was something much more than this involved. Within the court stood the tabernacle, where only the priests might go. At the door stood the laver, where priests might wash and change their clothes. But there was increasing sanctity with respect to the most holy, which could only be entered by the high priest; and even he could enter only on one day in the year—the great Day of Atonement.

When we call to mind some of the recorded claims and commands of God, there emerges at least one idea too obvious to be resisted, even by

the rankest of unbelievers. It is the concept of righteousness, of separation, of cleansing and of holiness. The thought is expressed repeatedly in the books of Moses. We may take one injunction as an example of such language: "ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation" (Ex. 19:6). The connection between this call to righteousness and the clothing of the priests in pure white linen is so evident as to need no argument. It can hardly be supposed that anyone would attempt to resist the conclusion that the fine linen, whether in garments or curtains, was emblematic of righteousness and separation.

This interpretation is not in any way affected by the fact that the Israelites quite failed to sustain the exalted standard to which they were called. The same scriptures tell us of their privileges and their failures. The prophets all insisted that Israel was a chosen nation, in a position incomparably higher than that of any other people, but withal they used language of sustained

\* First published September 1948.

1. [Dec. 2002, p. 440.](#)

condemnation unmatched in any other literature. There is one passage in the prophecy of Isaiah which in one of these terrible denunciations makes use of white as a symbol of righteousness and scarlet as a symbol of sin (1:2-20). The people are denounced as a "sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity". The nation is described as a body with no soundness in it from foot to head, but with "wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores". Yet in the same chapter comes the assurance that, though their sins were as scarlet, they could be made white as snow; though they were red like crimson, they could be as wool.

Here we have a clear indication of significance in different colours. A snow-like whiteness symbolises a Divine purity, while scarlet is a symbol of human imperfection. Few men will deny the appropriateness of these meanings. A famous poet has sung of human life, with its many colours, staining the white radiance of immortality. Isaiah's use of these colours finds a responsive understanding in our minds.

IF, then, it is admitted that the linen curtains enclosing the court of Israel's sanctuary represented righteousness and separation, we next have to take note of the fact that other colours, including the significant scarlet, were at the entrance. At one end of the court the fifty cubits of breadth were divided into a central gateway of twenty cubits with four pillars supporting a needlework hanging, while on each side of the entrance three pillars supported the usual linen curtains. Why this difference at the entrance? To enter the court one would need to pass a curtain wrought with needlework of blue, purple, scarlet and fine linen, hanging on four pillars.

As in the earlier article, we may in imagination examine the sanctuary, this time not only to observe all that is there, but to seek for meanings. As we pass this curtain and enter the court we see that there is a similar hanging at the door of the tabernacle, but, strangely, supported by five pillars instead of four. And if we enter the sanctuary we see the same colours at the entrance of the most holy place, but, instead of being a needlework hanging, it is a "cunningly woven veil". This, like the hanging at the entrance of the outer court, is on four pillars.

If any reader, believer or unbeliever, makes an honest attempt to understand these symbols, there are surely some facts too obvious for any one to reject. The most holy place beyond the

veil clearly represented the immortal condition and the power of the Eternal, for it was here that the Divine presence was said to be—not in any of the symbols used, but in the open space above the mercy seat, between the cherubim. From here came the voice which so often gave instruction to Moses. Here too, beneath the cherubim, was the ark of the covenant containing the tables of stone on which the commandments were written.

WHY was it that the most holy was so jealously guarded from the approach or the observation of any but the high priest? Why was it that even the high priest could only enter on one day of the year, and then with meticulous observation of all the ceremonial commanded, lest he should die? Why the exclusion of all others from the sanctuary when the cunningly woven veil was parted on the Day of Atonement? Judging the matter from any point of view, the apostle's explanation surely seems reasonable: ". . . the Holy [Spirit] this signifying, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing" (Heb. 9:8).

The apostle also gives an explanation of the veil: ". . . a new and living way, which he [Jesus] hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh" (10:20). This at once suggests an explanation of the various colours, blue, purple, scarlet and fine linen, found at each entrance—not merely the Divine righteousness symbolised by the fine linen, but the scarlet of human flesh and blood. Purple is mentioned in the book of Judges as the raiment of kings (8:26), and it is twice referred to in the Song of Solomon in connection with royal display (3:10; 7:5). It may reasonably be assumed to indicate royalty.

The significance of blue is not quite so clear. Cloths of blue were used to cover some of the holy utensils of the tabernacle, and blue ribbons were to be on the fringes of the garments of the people, that looking upon these adornments they might remember the commandments of God. A meaning is suggested by the thought of an eastern sky when there are no clouds. It seems reasonable that the colour most suggestive of heaven above should be used to remind the people of commandments coming from thence. These ideas certainly fit in with the explanation that the veil represented Christ in the days of his flesh—blue, purple, scarlet and fine linen cunningly woven into one piece. He was a gift from heaven, he

was born a king, he was of human nature and he was perfectly righteous.

Looking into the matter more closely, we find a remarkable passage in the Gospels, fitting in perfectly with the apostolic exposition, but without any reason being offered or any attention being drawn to the significance of the incident recorded. At the moment when Jesus died, "the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom" (Mt. 27:51; Mk. 15:38; cf. Lk. 23:45). No comment is made; the bare fact is stated and nothing more is mentioned about it.

All readers know that when Solomon's temple was built it was on the basis that had been presented in the service of the tabernacle. The temple had its holy place and its veil. The temple erected in later years by Herod was on the same general pattern in the facilities it offered for worship. It is clear, then, that the rending of the veil at the moment of Christ's death exactly harmonised with the meaning stated in the letter to the Hebrews. He made a way into the most holy, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh. We can hardly suppose that an unbeliever would affirm that there was collusion between the two writers, and that the author of the Gospel record, having invented such an incident, left it for readers to see the hidden meaning.

The veil being rent from the top to the bottom is in itself significant. The top of the veil would be too high for human hands easily to reach. The rending was from above. It certainly seems that this incident is in the category of undesigned harmonies such as abound in Scripture.

We remember that in the book of Leviticus very particular instruction was given to the high priest regarding his entering the most holy on the great Day of Atonement. He was not to wear the ceremonial robe of glory and beauty. He had to wear special vestments of pure white linen. "These are holy garments", we read; "therefore shall he wash his flesh in water, and so put them on" (16:4). Then, with incense as a symbol of prayer, and with blood to be sprinkled seven times before the Lord, he moved aside the veil and entered the most holy place. In like manner Jesus washed his flesh in water at baptism. He was anointed with the Holy Spirit. He put on the garments of perfect righteousness, and through the rending of his flesh he made a way into the most holy.

A BELIEVER in the Bible feels to be on strong ground when an apostle leads the way in the interpretation of symbols. He is naturally interested to see the further significance of matters closely related to the explanation given, although the apostle does not mention them. Even an unbeliever, if he is a reasonable man, will recognise a certain obligation to examine these matters that have been handed down to us with such force of tradition. If he makes close examination he will assuredly perceive a succession of harmonies which challenge his scepticism. On the basis of the apostolic explanation, we may proceed step by step to other meanings which it would be increasingly difficult to dismiss as being fortuitous.



## Correspondence

*Comments on articles appearing in the magazine are always welcome, and should be addressed to the editor in whose section the article appears.*

### Who wrote Ecclesiastes?

In his article, "Did Solomon write Ecclesiastes in repentance?" (Mar. 2003, p. 73) Brother Dennis Elliott states that the authorship of Ecclesiastes has been called in question by some, but that internal evidence clearly shows that it was written by Solomon after he repented. One writer who called the authorship into question was the late Brother Harry Whittaker.<sup>1</sup> I have examined his analysis and found it to be sound, and have my own observations to add to the subject.

Firstly, the authorship of Ecclesiastes is traditionally attributed to Solomon, but it is *tradition*—to be specific, *Jewish tradition*. There is nothing wrong with accepting tradition provided it is rigorously examined against Scriptural evidence. There is no evidence that Solomon wrote Ecclesiastes; in fact the opposite is true.

The author of 1 Kings comments that Solomon "loved many strange women" (11:1). This

1. "Who wrote Ecclesiastes?", *Bible Studies*, p. 217.