

Truth for Today

The Bible Explained

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The significance of colours in the Bible: White

Almost fifty years ago, I recall sitting in a lecture room of an art college listening to a tutor speaking on "Colour". He had begun this lesson by projecting a slide showing a white rectangle. He then showed one of a brighter white. Then, with the students gasping a little, he showed an even brighter one. He carried on doing this until an almost blindingly white screen beamed out at us. It was amazing to see **so** many different degrees of the colour white.

Today, as we consider the colour "white", we will see that its spiritual meaning will depend upon its context in the scriptures. The rhyming verses that follow indicate some of these:

*White's a precious colour!
Pure as driven snow!
White's a precious colour!
With it angels glow!
White's a precious colour
In a ray of light.
White's a precious colour!
Shining clear and bright.*

*White's the precious colour
Of the manna giv'n.
White's the precious colour
Of the Bread from heav'n.
White's the precious colour
Of our Saviour pure.
White's a precious colour
Proving He'll endure.*

*White's the precious colour
Of God's cleansing power.
White's the precious colour
Gleaming hour by hour.
White's the precious colour
Of acceptance too.
White's a precious colour;
'Tis Salvation's hue.*

*White's the precious colour
Of the steeds we see.
White's the precious colour
Of sweet victory.
White's the precious colour
Beaming from the King.
White's the precious colour
In His raiment seen.*

*White's the precious colour
Of the Ancient's hair.
White's the precious colour
Wisdom to declare.
Gracious God, we thank Thee
For this colour white.
We love and adore Thee -
In Thyself delight.*

GE Stevens

In the Old Testament, the word most often used for the colour white is “laban”. Other Hebrew words are also employed for white linen; fine white linen; a dazzling white; and white like snow.

In the New Testament, we find the Greek word “leukos” meaning “white”, “light” or “bright”. It is sometimes extended to “leukainō” meaning to “make white” or to “whiten”. “Koniaō” also means to make white.

In this talk, we will concentrate on a few occasions where the colour “white” is used in the Old and New Testaments. They include those for

1. The manna;
2. The hair of the leper;
3. Asses;
4. Snow;
5. The Nazarites;
6. Clothing;
7. A stone;
8. A Horse; and
9. A throne.

1. The manna

The first scripture we'll consider is Exodus 16 where we see the children of Israel murmuring against their leaders, Moses and Aaron. They did this because they were hungry. The Lord knew of this murmuring and counted it as being against himself. He spoke to Moses saying, *“Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a certain rate every day, that I may prove them, whether they will walk in my law, or no”* (Exodus 16:4). He went on to give specific instructions in relation to this food which came from above. It was called “Manna”.

In John 6 we can see that it was in fact a prophetic picture of Christ as spiritual food for the faithful. We read the words of the people to Him in John 6:31: *“Our fathers did eat manna in the desert; as it is written, He gave them bread from heaven to eat.”* Jesus answered them saying, *“Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world”* (John 6:32-33). In John 6, He calls Himself the “True Bread” (John 6:32); the Bread of God that gives life to the world (John 6:33); the Bread of Life (John 6:35) on whom believers should feed forever having been given eternal life; and the Living Bread who is eternal and both gives and sustains life forever.

Returning to Exodus 16, we find the people didn't know what this substance was so they called it, “Manna” (See Exodus 16:31) which means, “What is it?” Moses informed them that it was the bread which the LORD had given them to eat. (Exodus 16:32). This was just as it was with Jesus. He came to His own and, in general, His own received Him not (see John 1:11). They didn't know who He was.

When we run our eyes down to Exodus 16:31 we read: *“...It was like coriander seed, white; and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey.”* This has typical meanings for Christ. The “coriander seed” is so called because of the furrows that run across it. It reminds us of the sufferings of Christ. The taste of it being like honey reminds us of the abundance of blessing He brings as well as the encouragement of God's word (see Numbers 14:8 and Proverbs 24:13). Also, in Psalm 19:9-10, honey is used to describe the righteous judgment of the LORD. So we can see Christ as both the Saviour and as the Son of God to whom all judgment has been given. Furthermore, in Exodus 16:14 Manna is described as a “small round thing”. The smallness reminds us of the humility of Christ (Philippians 2:5-8) while the roundness demonstrates He has no beginning and no end. He is eternal (John 1:1-2; Revelation 1:18). Lastly, the manna was white - a pearly white. The pearl in scripture is associated with truth and holiness. It speaks of the Lord Jesus who said, *“I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me”* (John 14:6). The colour white also confirms His purity or intrinsic righteousness: He knew no sin and did no sin. In fact, there was no sin in Him (1 John 3:5).

2. Hair of the leper

In contrast to this, we can turn to Leviticus 13:3 and read of a person with leprosy, *“...The priest shall look on the plague in the skin of the flesh: and when the hair in the plague is turned white, and the plague in sight be deeper than the skin of his flesh, it is a plague of leprosy: and the priest shall look on him, and pronounce him unclean.”*

Here we see that white hair was one of the indicators of leprosy. The plagued man was obliged to rend his clothes, make bare his head, put a covering on his upper lip, and cry, “unclean, unclean” (Leviticus 13:45). He is classed as being defiled. In spiritual terms, leprosy is a symbol of sin in two aspects.

- a. It is seen outwardly speaking of the activities of sin; and

- b. It is already hidden in the blood and speaks of our fallen nature - sin within.

The white hair symbolises the spiritual decay of a person as seen in his or her actions. When a Christian is conscious that he has sinned, he is to confess [that is, judge] the sins before God who is faithful and just to forgive his sins and to cleanse him from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). God is able to do this righteously because Christ bore the punishment of believers' sins in His own body on the cross (1 Peter 2:24). Note, the Christian may approach God directly in prayer in order to do this (Hebrews 4:16).

3. Asses

Flicking over to Judges 5:10 we read: *"Speak, ye that ride on white asses, ye that sit in judgment, and walk by the way."* The white ass indicated the riches and honour of those who owned them in Israel at that time. For example, those in the official capacity of being judges rode upon them in Judges 5:10. In Judges 10:4 and Judges 12:14 we find the sons of noble families possessed the privilege of riding on the colts of asses. So white, in this context, is linked with prosperity and honour. This gives an added meaning to the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ rode into Jerusalem on a colt, the foal of an ass (see Matthew 21:5-7). He was the Messiah, the King of the Jews and the Son of God, yet One who had humbled Himself. In Zechariah 9 it is written: *"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass"* (Zechariah 9:9). Of course, He is not only the King, He is the honourable Judge also because we read in John 5:22-23: *"For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son: that all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him."* He has this honour because He is the Son of Man (John 5:27).

4. Snow

Isaiah 1 describes the complete corruption of Israel from head to toe; but the LORD offers a hand of mercy in Isaiah 1:18 where He says: *"Come now, and let us reason together ... though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."* The colours scarlet and crimson were dyes used to colour clothing. Here they represent the depth and fullness of sins staining a person. In order that the clothing can be made white, cleansing has to take place. So how can a person be cleansed from sin? Only through the blood of Christ who died as a sacrifice for sin and sins (see talk T1032 to be broadcast on 11 March 2018). Faith is the means by which this cleansing has been applied to people throughout the ages.

The cross of Christ is said to be "the centre of two eternities". Faith can look forward or backwards to the cross. An example is found in Revelation 7:14 where we read: *"These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."* The Great Tribulation period still remains future; but those who believe God in that day are seen as being washed in the blood of the Lamb. They, however, will not hear the same Gospel as the one preached today. They will be encouraged to fear the Creator God and give Him glory (Revelation 14:6). In other words, they were those who put their faith in God. So the white found in Isaiah 1:18 speaks of the "righteousness" of those who have been cleansed by Him.

In the Old Testament we read: *"For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul"* (Leviticus 17:11). This verse points forward to the unique sacrifice offered by Christ by the eternal Spirit.

5. The Nazarites

Next, we turn to the Song of Solomon 5:10 where we find a bride (typifying the faithful of Zion) describing her beloved (typifying Christ). She states: *"My beloved is white and ruddy, the chiefest among ten thousand."* It seems strange to describe a person as being "white" but if we turn to Lamentations 4:7 we read, *"Her Nazarites were purer than snow, they were whiter than milk, they were more ruddy in body than rubies, their polishing was of sapphire..."* Therefore, the colour white reveals a direct link between Christ and the Nazarite. The word Nazarite comes from the Hebrew meaning "to separate" or "to consecrate". It identifies a person who has separated himself to God under a special promise. Consecration relates to a "filling of the hands". It is offering to God that which He, previously, has given to us (see Numbers 6:1-21). In the case of the Nazarite, this was his life. Hence, Christ devoted His life here to God His Father. He was the Anointed One especially raised up by God as an instrument of His power. The Nazarite was not to touch strong drink or anything that came of the vine (see Numbers 6:1-4). This indicates Christ was a man marked by self-control. One who was filled by the Holy Spirit.

Furthermore, no razor was to come upon the head of the Nazarite (Numbers 6:5). His long hair was an outward sign of his inner sanctity. He was subject to the will of God. The Lord Jesus Christ could say to God His Father, *"Nevertheless, not my will, but thine, be done"* (Luke 22:42) and *"I have glorified thee on the earth, I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do"* (John 17:4).

Again, the Nazarite was not to touch a dead body (Numbers 6:6). Death is the wages of sin (see Romans 6:23). The dead body represents death as God's judgment. Should the Nazarite touch such, he would be defiled. It reminds us that Christ is the Holy One. As noted already, He knew no sin (2 Corinthians 5:21). He did no sin (1 Peter 2:22). There was no sin in Him (1 John 3:5). He could not sin!

6. Clothing

In the transfiguration of our Lord Jesus Christ, about 2,000 years ago, we read that His face shone like the sun and His clothing shone as white as the light (Matthew 17:2). This outshining excellence (or glory) of God's Son was there seen in the radiant warmth of grace emanating from His face and the brightness of His purity flowing from His garment. In 2 Corinthians 4:6 we read: *"For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."* So the face of Jesus revealed the glory of God whose nature is love. The white clothing shining like light expresses His holiness. We know from 2 Peter 1:16 that the complete picture introduces us to His majesty. He will reign as King of kings in a future day. His kingdom will never be superseded.

7. A stone

As we continue seeking out white objects in scripture we discover a white stone in Revelation 2:17. There the Christian who remains faithful (despite the unfaithfulness about him) is given a white stone upon which a new name is written. This name remains a secret except to the one who owns it. Historically, a white stone was given to winners in the games of ancient Rome. It had the name of the winner scribed on it and served as an invitation to a special banquet that followed. Hence, the white stone given to the overcomer shows that he is accepted and has access to the presence of the Lord. It is at His right hand that there is fullness of joy and pleasures for evermore (Psalm 16:11).

8. A Horse

We move on to look at a white horse. Revelation 19:11 states: *"And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war."* Again, in ancient times a white horse was a symbol of victory in war. The Lord Jesus is the rider called Faithful and True. It speaks of the time of Armageddon, when He appears to put down the enemies seeking to annihilate Israel and its religion. The Lord will wipe them out.

9. A throne

Finally, we come to the great white throne of Revelation 20:11 where we read: *"And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them."* This throne is set up after the 1,000 year reign of Christ when we are introduced to a new heaven and a new earth. The Person who sits upon it, as judge, is God. His throne is marked by judgment and justice (Psalm 89:14). Before Him stand the wicked who have been raised from their graves. Each of them is judged by God according to the record of their works while they lived on earth. Without exception they are cast into the lake of fire which is called the "second death" (see Revelation 20:6, 14). They will experience torments eternally. Oh, how we pray that you, dear listener, will not be found there.

Conclusion

So, we have come to see that the meaning of the colour white is understood by the object which it describes. Also, we have seen it representing Christ in a variety of aspects besides in elements such as devotion, cleansing, purity, acceptance, majesty, victory and justice. We at *Truth for Today*, sincerely hope that you have been cleansed by the precious blood of Christ having received Him by faith and that you are walking with Him in love. If so, the words of Jesus in Revelation 3:4-5 may be applied to you, namely, *"Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy. He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels."*

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