

The Colours of the Ephod

by: James McBroom

“And they shall make the ephod of gold, of blue, and of purple, of scarlet, and fine twined linen with cunning work.”

Exodus 28:6

Besides the actual fabrics which composed the structure there were certain colours arranged in such a way as to give an appearance of magnificence to the whole. The tabernacle itself was made with ten curtains of fine twined linen with blue, purple, and scarlet and covered with cunningly wrought cherubim. Then there was the hangings before each entrance, including the holy veil, as well as the clothes of service and the priestly robes all being brought from the great workshop of nature and cunningly wrought by the designer for beauty and order, because it was the habitation of Him who deigned to take up His abode among His people. The fine twined linen gave a groundwork for the colours, and is in itself a fit emblem of the spotless humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ, while the colours speak of the combination of graces and perfections which were proper to Him. This is seen in Hebrews 10, where the holy veil is said to represent His humanity. As the colours were arranged in the cloth in an orderly way so that unity and consistency would be seen in the whole, they speak of the moral perfections of Him in whom all was so perfectly blended as to set forth a perfect human life on the earth.

A distinction must be made, however, between these colours. The purple and scarlet are well known to indicate dispensational and royal glory both in Israel and the nations, speaking both of the Davidic sway and the time when the kingdom under the whole heaven shall be given to Him as Son of Man. Blue is the colour which speaks of heaven and heavenly things. This gives an interest to the latter different from the other two. While the claims of royalty and kingly dignity is seen in every step, all was in perfect accord with the ways, thoughts, and life of heaven all the way through. It will be seen that the blue was the predominating colour all through, for besides the combination with purple and scarlet, it is found in many places where the others are absent. See the lower fastenings of the breastplate, the long blue robe of the ephod, the ribbon which encircled the mitre and encircled the holy crown, and such is the Spirit's use of this colour that it appears again in another set of symbols altogether where everything speaks of glory. We allude to the Scripture use of precious stones where we meet with the

sapphire, which is said to be the colour of the deep blue sky. It is found in combination to exhibit the divine glory in Creation, Grace, and Redemption (Ezek. 28:13, Ex. 28:18; Rev. 21:19), and is used in the description of the throne of God Himself (Ex. 24:10; Ezek. 1:26).

If the first four things mentioned in the above verse speak of the glories of the Son of God, Personal, Moral and Official, covering a very wide field; the fine linen into which these things were wrought, or dyed, speaks of the Man Christ Jesus in whom all glories shine. In this fine linen, we pass in thought from the side of eternal Godhead in an eternal Person, to the side of Manhood in the same Person and behold the Man in whom every glory centres and indeed go beyond that to the complete unveiling of God.

Of the five things mentioned, all of them except gold were to be found in the *veil* of the sanctuary. Here, the inwrought cherubim took the place of the gold, whereas in the *ephod* the gold was present but no cherubim. The holy veil hung between the holy place and the holiest of all and was suspended by golden hooks upon four pillars. This formed a doorway into the place where all was gold and every whit uttered glory. The Man Christ Jesus is in Himself the "way" into where all the deep unfoldings of God are displayed. The veil speaks of His *flesh*, that is, His precious *body* (Heb. 10:20); and if the four pillars be taken as expressive of the four Gospels and their writers, we can see the answer to the Holy of Holies in His Person and are led to these holy records as being the inner shrine of God's holy book. The fact that the veil speaks of His flesh explains the reason why the *gold* was displaced by cherubim, for that holy Man ever displayed the justice of God which the cherubim set forth, but beyond all that "God was in Christ" a holy mystery which speaks of the heavenly grandeur which was inside the veil.

With the *ephod* it was different. Here, Christ is prefigured as Head of a **new order in resurrection.**

This leads in thought to the Epistles of the New Testament and particularly to Hebrews where He is seen as the great King-Priest, the *Glorified Man*. To supply a figure of this there must also be gold. "He that said unto him, Thou art my Son, to-day have begotten thee. As he saith also in another place, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec" (Heb. 5:5-6). In the *Gospels* we see Christ in relation to God's glory in **this world**, the scene of sin and man's failure; but in the *Epistles* we behold Him **Head of a new world**, which is the domain of divine purpose where all His glorious perfections shine out, with nothing of sin to interfere.

While we dare not separate, we may profitably distinguish between the unique Personality of the Man Christ Jesus and the various features of glory and beauty that shone out in Him. There were incidents in that busy life that brought each to the front, here one, and there another, so that it might be the outshining of the gold of divine Sonship or, the simple display of the *Man* who stamped everything with the blue of heaven's beauty. Again, it might be the dispensing of covenant blessings as Son of David or, the homeless Son of Man who was the appointed Heir of all things. But besides these, there were times when He might be seen as it were in the centre of a circle, where each glory combined in such beautiful harmony in Him, as to give all in one distinctive view.

Two outstanding events, namely, the Temptation at the beginning of His ministry and the Transfiguration at the end may illustrate this. At the end of Matthew 3 the Father proclaims Him, His Beloved Son and immediately the tempter comes forward with the challenge: "If thou be the Son of God". All this relates surely to the *gold* of His glory, but the tempter goes on to that which relates to the *blue* as seen in the Man out of heaven. The first temptation takes us back to Eden and the Lord's answer from Deuteronomy gives a sublime description of man's place in relation to God, but in an obedience peculiar to Himself — "The obedience of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet 1:2). The second recalls the *scarlet* by the mention of the holy city and the temple. The third recalls the *purple* and bespeaks His universal place as Son of Man by the mention of the high mountain and the kingdoms of the world. This is a scene of perfect moral beauty. God gets His place; man gets his place; and, for the first time in man's history, the devil gets his place from One who has a perfect right to all but seeks no place at all.

The vision on the holy mount presents a scene of unalloyed delight, where there is nothing to oppose. We judge there is nothing absent to complete the picture which, by including the Father's voice and the Shekinah, carries us in thought **beyond the administrative order** of full millennial display, to the

glories of the Father's house where sons shall be at home with the Father and the Son, in a scene pervaded by the Spirit's power. The heavens and earth in all their departments of blessing and glory are depicted here, but beyond that the Father's voice indicates something, which John the Apostle of love was given to bring out, and the blessed Son of the Father, who is here rejected by man, is the centre and guarantee of all.

God's order in the race must be noted that we may see how this blessed Man adapted Himself in every way to the divine plan. The Creator puts forth His intentions for the race in one Man. The character and order for the whole is set forth in the Head. This works out both in regard to created status and moral condition; those connected with Adam being *earthly* as to creaturehood and *sinful* in moral condition, while those connected with Christ are *heavenly* in origin and *holy* as to condition. In all this we can see Adam as a figure of Him that was to come. Here we touch the scheme of sacred typology, the wealth of which pours itself out around the Person of this blessed Man. This in itself is a rich study but we must remember that it is only one side, that side indeed which connects itself with the time ways of God. When we turn to the study of God's eternal purpose, we behold our Lord as the eternal Son, marked out for incarnation and redemption. Consequently, Adam's creation was a necessity and He, the eternal One, the great proto-type. We rightly say that at the birth of our Lord, all, including heaven, earth, and hell, were in commotion (Ps. 90; Heb. 10; Matt. 2; Luke 2; Rev. 12). But along with that, God required One to make known His plan and purpose. Man on earth needed a Redeemer and Satan the enemy looked on, entirely ignorant of divine resources, trying if he could, to thwart and hinder the work of the blessed God. The advent of the Son met every need, God's perfect *claims* and all His desires, and man's every *need*, and for ever defeated and exposed all the forces of evil.

That advent filled up the whole ways of God by taking up every thread of these ways, not only in type and shadow but also in promise; prophecy; government and grace; imparting a completeness to all, while at the same time going back beyond Genesis. He, the Son, linked up in Himself the whole scheme of God's eternal purpose, that God might be made known in a triumph of glory from eternity to eternity, and the universe put on the basis, not only of omnipotence but on the stable footing of redemption which, through Calvary's depth of woe, the depths of God found a channel to flow forth.

From the above it will be seen that the Incarnation made it possible for the Spirit of God to speak of our Lord both as **Second Man** and **Last Adam**, while everything both in nature and revelation witnesses to

Him as *first* in **cause, dignity, moral sequence** and **result**. In coming into time, unlike Adam, He became a *babe*, that in every phase of human life God might be glorified. Much was called for in this world, for moral disorder prevailed and all along the line outstanding individuals had tried to put things right. Being themselves part of the ruin, this was impossible. The only way things could be put right was by **Calvary**, since man was lying under the judgment of death. He came to die *that* death and to redeem the creature who lay under it, but all the way to it from the manger was marked by His putting the stamp of heaven and the will of God on every detail of life here as in flesh and blood. What could be more pleasing to God? And what could be sweeter to the believing heart that has drawn upon His grace and delights to worship Him?

Before coming to the New Testament, let us glance a moment at the range of moral instruction wrapped up in these holy garments. Aaron was to be clothed with garments for glory and ornament. The Tabernacle had been previously set out in prescriptive order which, in type, speaks of the holy universal order and calls for a living centre who would impart life and completeness to the whole scene. The high priest is the answer. He is taken out of ordinary life and clothed with these garments of official splendour as foreshadowing our Lord in His triumph and splendour, at the centre of redeemed creation. The ingenuity of divine device gives a present application of all this as a faith system in the Assembly, as seen in the Epistle to the Hebrews, but in the nature of things the typical significance goes on to the full issue in glory.

The fine linen of the passage is the translation of the Hebrew word **Shes**, which signifies *whiteness* and supplies another colour to the group mentioned here. It would remind us of the spotless purity of the Man Christ Jesus. It was woven of twisted threads of flax, foreshadowing the union in Him of every beautiful grace, in the power of which every detail of that perfect life was adjusted.

The Person of our Lord Jesus Christ presents such an infinite variety of beauty and glory that we can never reach its end. And nowhere in the Old Testament is the plenitude of that beauty and glory more in evidence typically than in the complex character of these priestly robes. We are in the company of the same wonderful Person here when dealing with the purple as when speaking of gold, blue, and scarlet, but the attendant circumstances are very different. If gold is used to delineate the glory of the Son of God, and blue the same One as Man out of heaven, scarlet and purple speak of His kingly beauty and regal splendour both in connection with the covenant people on the earth and with the wider ranges of creation. Of the latter two the scarlet may have in view His connection with the

earthly people, and the purple His place over all as Son of Man.

It is interesting to know that purple may be produced in natural things by mixing scarlet and blue, since it seems to show a strong link of connection between the natural and spiritual orders of creation. By bringing together the place of our Lord as Messiah in Israel with that of the Man out of heaven, we reach all that is necessary for the full mediatorial place of the Man Christ Jesus; purple is the figure of this latter, and it combines all that the scarlet and blue adumbrate.

Looking closely at those "five words" which contain something of the glories of our Lord, we are reminded of what is said in another place, viz., that the world itself could not contain the books which might be written on such a theme. A Saviour who, on the one hand is God over all, marked by divine righteousness and glory (Gold), and on the other, by incarnation as the Second Man out of heaven (Blue), comes necessarily before us in regal majesty and kingly beauty as the appointed Heir of all things (Purple), and Son of David, King of Israel, that nation's glorious King (Scarlet), while behind all, we are led in the fine twined linen to see Him as loving righteousness and hating iniquity, and exhibiting a life of unstained purity in a world of sin and death, where all had gone their own way and outraged the claims of God.

Much patience is required if we would enter into these things and watching daily at His gates. He delights to be sought after and is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him out. To be admitted to the place of intimacy inside, to behold the King in His beauty, to have the heart delighted with the sight of Him as Centre of such varied glories is a favour of no ordinary degree, and recalls His own words to His disciples, "Blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear". "We beheld", says Peter, "His majesty on the holy mount". Stephen saw Him in the centre of the glory of God, and since then it is the privilege of every child of faith to look up and see Jesus, crowned with glory and honour, at the right hand of God. "For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth".

There are some, alas! who seem to have no taste for these things. There are, it is well-known, certain persons afflicted with a certain defect called colour blindness. Much of the sublime in nature is lost to such. The beauty of the rainbow above, or the richly decorated landscape beneath, which lends a charm to our life here, elevating the heart often above the pressure of mental and moral troubles is unknown to them. What shall be said of those who are morally blind and are content to remain in that condition. The language of repentant Israel, as recorded by the Holy Ghost is: "He hath no form or lordliness, and when we

see Him there is no beauty that we should desire Him". Contrast here Psalm 27:4, "One thing have I desired of the Lord (...) to behold the beauty of the Lord and to enquire in His temple". How deplorably sad it must be for those who interest themselves in the things of the Lord sufficient only to secure heaven at the end, but conform to the ways and fashions of the world and fail to catch a glimpse of the beauty of Him who is the fairest among ten thousand and the altogether lovely One.

The purple and scarlet of the above verse speak of our Lord in what is magnificent and gorgeous, and combine in Him with the moral and spiritual verities indicated by the other three things, viz., gold, blue, and fine twined linen. He is a heavenly Man in the royalty marked by divine righteousness and stainless purity,

and His rule is set before us in the Word as having a two-fold bearing. The first is His place as Son of David, King of Israel, the second, that of Son of Man in universal sway in the creation, and it is generally agreed that the scarlet refers to the former glory and the purple to the latter. With the one we may connect the thought of the microscope showing the minute perfections of His grace and glory in a small nation on the earth, the people which, in grace, He stooped to link Himself with in the working out of God's ways in time (see the Psalms, particularly Ps. 2, Ps. 45, Ps. 72), and with the other, the telescope opening out the far-reaching extent of His dominions as King of kings and Lord of lords, and as swaying the whole creation of God (see Ps. 8, and its various quotations in the writings of Paul).