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Gold, Silver And Bronze

Precious Metals in the Bible

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The Bible is God's Word, yet the intended audience is not God but we ourselves. As such we can expect it to be understood plainly for the most part, because God has not tried to hide its main message. At the same time the divine authorship makes it clear there are deeper truths within its pages that require searching and meditation to be understood.

Whether reading and understanding the Word at face value or digging into it to uncover precious gems, we need the Holy Spirit. "For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God" (1 Cor. 2:11 NKJV). Given its Author, we can be confident that even the fine points of Scripture are never meaningless. When a detail is mentioned, God has a purpose for it. We may not always understand a word's significance, but we should not doubt the wisdom of God. He would not include anything that is not important.

Sometimes the Bible speaks generically, and then we know we've been told all we need to know. Other times specific details are shared, to which we should pay close attention. For example, some verses speak of trees in a general sense, and others may mention a specific type of tree, such as an apple tree (Song 8:5). Certain accounts tell of an abundance of fish, others mention the exact number – the 153 in John 21:11. In several cases we read of cords without distinctions; elsewhere cords have more detail, including "scarlet" (Josh. 2:21). There is a reason for every detail. With this in mind let us now look at what the Bible tells us about the precious metals of gold, silver and bronze.

General Thoughts About Precious Metals

In the creation account of Genesis 1 we read of the origin of what we see around us, untainted by sin. God spoke, divided, fashioned, formed and placed, resulting in: light and darkness; land and water; sun, moon, and stars; animals and plants; and humankind. In Genesis 2 God “planted a garden” (v. 8), and out from it came a river. “Now a river went out of Eden to water the garden, and from there it parted and became four riverheads. The name of the first is Pishon; it is the one which skirts the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold” (vv. 10-11).

Among the many resources, God in His wisdom created gold and placed it where man could find it. Yet, He made gold rare enough for it to be valuable. God said the gold of Havilah was “good” (v. 12). We may wonder, why didn’t He cover the face of the earth with it in abundance? God is not materialistic like we are. We note, too, that scientifically gold is only 3 protons ¹ away from being lead, which has no significance of itself.

The preciousness of gold comes as a result of God making it precious. God appreciates gold only because of the significance He has placed on it, and the same goes for silver, bronze or anything else. We look at the outward appearances of things and limit their preciousness to how pleasant they are to our eyes or their monetary value. However, there is much more to them than this.

When God wanted to create a pattern of heavenly things on earth He gave detailed instructions to Moses on how to build the tabernacle and each component. God wasn’t trying to wow His people with this design; every item had significance to God, and this is why Moses was instructed to follow the pattern exactly, precisely, or “just so” (Ex. 25:9). He provided the specific details because the design portrayed something only He knew about, and the final arrangement would only please Him if it reminded Him of the importance He placed on each item.

By application the same can be said for worship today. We should not think we know best how to please God. There is no need for guesswork here since He has given us a pattern that is clearly precious to Him. Do we think God appreciates the pitch-perfect melodies of a professional singer more than the common person who lifts his or her voice to praise God? Is God more impressed by the music of a worship

¹ The atomic structure of gold is 79 protons / electrons and 118 neutrons.

band than a heartfelt song lifted up to Him while doing a menial or even unpleasant task?

We should use every talent God has given us for His glory, but let us not deceive ourselves into thinking God values things like we do. He desires a willing heart, which brings us to the three metals which were used in the construction of the tabernacle: “Take from among you an offering to the LORD. Whoever is of a willing heart, let him bring it as an offering to the LORD: gold, silver, and bronze” (Ex. 35:5).

Gold

Gold has been considered valuable and precious throughout history. This is partly because of its rarity and, no doubt, its shininess. But just like the coveted gold medal at the Olympics or a gold ring given as a marriage token, the item itself is often not as significant as the circumstances around how it was obtained.

As an element gold is quite remarkable. It is one of the least reactive metals and resists practically all acid tests that affect other metals, such as silver and copper. Gold is mostly not affected, allowing us to purify gold by getting rid of everything else. Job saw in this a very practical instruction for how God can test what is of real value in us: “But He knows the way that I take; when He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold” (Job 23:10).

Gold is also extremely malleable, or flexible – more than any other metal. A single gram can be beaten into a sheet 1-meter square, and strands as thin as a single atom in thickness can be created.² This is how gold could be woven into the priests’ garments (Ex. 28:5-8) and shaped into a lampstand with ornamental decorations (25:31).

Gold was one of the gifts brought to the Child Jesus (Matt. 2:11). It is used on almost all the items inside the tent of the tabernacle (Ex. 35–38), in Solomon’s temple (1 Ki. 6), as well as the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:18-21). It speaks of deity and divine righteousness. A. J. Pollock (1864–1957) clarified this by saying, “Gold is typical of deity when in reference to Christ; of divine righteousness when seen in relation to men. In Exodus whenever gold is typical of deity, it is always ‘pure gold’: when it

² Gold. Wikipedia (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gold>); taken September 13, 2021.

typifies divine righteousness, the word 'gold' is employed without the adjective *pure*.”³

In the tabernacle gold was often paired with wood. The wood used in the ark of the covenant was overlaid with gold, inside and out. Gold speaks of Christ's deity, and the wood tells of His humanity. God is pleased to be reminded of Christ when He sees the gold. To reiterate, the gold itself is nothing to God apart from that of which it reminds Him. In Matthew 23:17 Christ confirmed this: "Fools and blind! For which is greater, the gold or the temple that sanctifies the gold?" Therefore, when you read about or see gold, think about Christ the Son of God and His divine righteousness!

Silver

"Silver is usually produced as a by-product of copper, gold and other metals." ⁴ Depending on your Bible translation, you may not realize how often silver is mentioned.

A way to understand its significance is to consider its use in Exodus 30:16, where the term for "money" is the same as "silver": "You shall take the atonement money of the children of Israel, and shall appoint it for the service of the tabernacle of meeting, that it may be a memorial for the children of Israel before the LORD, to make atonement for yourselves." The atonement money, or ransom money, was what every male age 20 and over had to pay for himself. What was this price? It was a half shekel of silver. It didn't matter how rich or how poor you were, the amount was the same (v. 15). The half shekel is mentioned many times in Scripture, and the Lord Himself paid this with Peter using the coin from the fish's mouth (Matt. 17:27; see Ex. 30:12).

Silver speaks of the price of redemption. God's valuation of redemption is not respective of one's social standing, wealth, or any such thing. The price is always in connection with God's righteousness and the judgment needed. Silver is seen as connected with gold, like with the boards of the tabernacle overlaid with gold and set in pairs of silver sockets (Ex. 36:20-30). It is also associated with bronze in the

³ The Tabernacle's Typical Teaching. A.J. Pollock. (Taken from <https://www.stempublishing.com/authors/pollock/Tabernacle.html>, on September 13, 2021).

⁴ Silver. Wikipedia (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Silver>); taken September 13, 2021.

hooks and bands of silver for the bronze posts of the outer court (Ex. 38:10-20). You will notice that in the tabernacle the items that are Godward are gold, and the items manward are of bronze. Silver is associated with both.

Let us never think that we can buy our redemption (Ps. 49:8), for the silver itself was not the value, but it spoke of an infinite value that would be paid on our behalf. Humankind would sell the Lord for 30 pieces of silver (Matt. 26:15). However, the value God placed on our redemption was the blood of the Lord Jesus! "You were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold ... but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Pet. 1:18-19).

If you journeyed from Egypt toward the Promised Land with the children of Israel and were looking at the tops of the outer posts, you would see silver – salvation is not something we completed, it was from God, from above. The few who could enter the holy place inside the veil could see silver at the base of the boards covered in gold – the basis for His dealings with us as believers is founded on the finished work of Christ who shed His blood to redeem us.

Bronze

Bronze is a general term that can be used to refer to copper and its alloys; this is as much true in the Bible as it is today. Technically speaking, we can say that bronze usually refers to an alloy, or mixture, of copper and tin, or even aluminum and copper. Brass is a mixture of copper and zinc.

Copper, a soft metal, is used widely today because of its good ability to conduct electricity. There is a lot of copper in the earth. Even though it is estimated that over half of the copper ever mined has been in the last 25 years, at the current high rate of mining we have enough for several million years.⁵

The Bible refers to copper, or bronze, as an inexpensive unit of money (Matt. 10:29), but we also see it used to make items such as armor (1 Sam. 17:5-6; 1 Ki. 14:27). At God's direction, Moses made a serpent in the wilderness out of this material (Num. 21:9). As for the tabernacle, the posts of the outer court, the brazen altar, and the laver were all made of bronze.

The property of heat resistance is one of the primary reasons why we see it used for the brazen altar, and this is what can help us understand its significance.

⁵ Copper. Wikipedia (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Copper>); taken September 13, 2021.

Consider, too, the “fiery” serpent (Num. 21:8), where God used the same word as “seraph” – the singular form of “seraphim,” who are the angelic beings in the presence of God’s holiness (Isa. 6:2,6). By putting these examples together we gather the meaning behind the material: Copper and its various alloys of brass and bronze speak of judgment or the power to judge, and specifically Christ’s ability to bear the judgment on our behalf. As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:14-15).

The Lesson In Brief

Here then is the beauty of what we have in these three metals: they are a witness of the gospel message in its simplicity.

- **Gold** – God’s holy righteous standard is the bar set for fellowship with Him, yet we cannot reach it.
- **Silver** – The price paid to bring us to God, but the reality of this meant sin had to be judged.
- **Bronze** – Christ suffered the judgment from God on our behalf.

When you read of these precious metals remember what God sees in these materials: Christ and His work of salvation!

Before We End

Fine brass is distinct from bronze or just brass. The Old Testament version of this expression is polished brass, and the emphasis is on judgment. The copper is emphasized but there is a unique burnishing or polishing applied to it. Daniel 10:6 says, “His body was like beryl, His face like the appearance of lightning, His eyes like torches of fire, His arms and feet like burnished bronze in color, and the sound of His words like the voice of a multitude” (see Ezek. 1:7).

The translation in the New Testament is difficult because it speaks more of its appearance than its composition. The word means “whiteness” or “brilliance.” Most describe it as an alloy of potentially all three: gold, silver and copper. It is only used to describe Christ, and specifically, His feet. “His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters” (Rev. 1:15, see 2:18).

We therefore have in this term that encompassed all three metals the story of the gospel repeated. God is holy and righteous (gold) and must judge (brass) unrighteousness but has supplied a way for the price to be paid (silver). How precious!

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