

## Colors in the Bible

The woman that John sees in the wilderness *sits on a scarlet beast and wears purple and scarlet (Revelation 17:3-4)*. In apocalyptic literature, color plays an important role in conveying symbolic meanings. Here the purple and scarlet suggest that the woman has become affluent, probably through evil means.

Individual colors mentioned in the Bible fall into two major types-natural colors and artificial colors. Artificial colors, such as paints and dyes, were used widely in the ancient world. The Israelites had an advanced textile industry. They were skilled not only in weaving but also in dyeing. Since dyes were made from vegetable sources or from shellfish, quality control was difficult. The completed colors were often impure and inexact. These problems were compounded by the fact that many dyes were closely guarded family recipes which were sometimes lost or changed.

### Artificial Colors in the Bible

**Purple**-The most precious of ancient dyes (**Acts 16:14**) made from a shellfish found in the Mediterranean Sea. A total of 250,000 mollusks was required to make one ounce of dye, which partly accounts for its great price. It was highly valued within the nation of Israel. Used in several features of the tabernacle (**Exodus 26:1; 27:16**) and the temple (**2 Chronicles 2:14**); the color of royal robes (**Judges 8:26**); the garments of the wealthy (**Proverbs 31: 22; Luke 16:19**); the vesture of a harlot (**Revelation 17:4**) and the robe placed on Jesus (**Mark 15:17, 20**). The color of royalty.

**Blue**- Also derived from a species of shellfish; fabric dyed this color used in the tabernacle (**Exodus 26:1**) and the temple (**2 Chronicles 2:7**); also used for royal trappings (**Esther 1:6; 8:15**) and clothing for the rich (**Jeremiah 10:9; Ezekiel 23:6**).

**Red**- Existed in several shades; dye extracted from the bodies of insects. Crimson linen used in the temple (**2 Chronicles 2:7; 14; 3:14**); the color must have been indelible or permanent (**Jeremiah 4:30**), as crimson is used figuratively of sin (**Isaiah 1:18**). Scarlet cord tied around the wrist of Zerah (**Genesis 38:28-30**); used a great deal in the tabernacle (**Exodus 25:4**); the color of the cord hung from Rahab's window (**Joshua 2:18**); a mark of prosperity (2 Samuel 1:24; Proverbs 31:21); the color of the robe placed on Jesus (**Matthew 27:28**), though scarlet and purple were not always distinguished (**Mark 15:17**); color of the beast ridden by the harlot Babylon (**Revelation 17:3**) along with some of her garments (**Revelation 17:4**) and those of her followers (**Revelation 18:16**). Vermilion used in decorating homes of the wealthy (**Jeremiah 22:14**) and in the painting of idols (**Ezekiel 23:14**).

### Natural Colors in Blue

**Blue**- Used to describe the color of a wound, but may be the wound itself (**Proverbs 20:30 KJV**). The color of the sky.

**Brown**- A dark, blackish color referred only to sheep (**Genesis 30:32-33; 35, 40 KJV**).

**Black**- One of the more commonly used colors in Scripture; describes the color of the middle of the night (**Proverbs 7:9 KJV**); diseased skin (**Job 30:30**); healthy hair (**Song of Solomon 5:11; Matthew 5:36**); corpses' faces (**Lamentations 4:8**); the sky (**Jeremiah 4:28 KJV**); the darkening of the sun and the moon (**Joel 2:10**); horses (**Zechariah 6:2, 6; Revelation 6:5**); and marble (**Esther 1:6 KJV**). The color of famine and death.

**Gray**- Used only to describe the hair of the elderly (**Genesis 42:38; Proverbs 16:31**).

**Green**- Normally describes vegetation; used of pastures (**Psalms 23:2**) herbage (**2 Kings 19:26**); trees in general (**Deuteronomy 12:2; Luke 23:31; Revelation 8:7**); the marriage bed (in a figurative sense, **Song of Solomon 1:16**); a hypocrite compared to a papyrus plant (Job 8:16); and grass (**Mark 6:39**). A word meaning "greenish" describes plague spots (**Leviticus 13:49; 14:37**).

**Red**- Describes natural objects such as Jacob's stew (**Genesis 25:30**); the sacrificial heifer (**Numbers 19:2**), wine (**Proverbs 23:31**); newborn Esau (**Genesis 25:25**); Judah's eyes (**Genesis 49:12 KJV**); the eyes of the drunkard (**Proverbs 23:29**); and the dragon (**Revelation 12:3**). The color of blood, it often symbolizes life; it also suggests carnage of war.

**White**- The color of animals (**Genesis 30:35**); manna (**Exodus 16:31**); both hair and pustules located in plague sores (**Leviticus 13:3-39**); garments (**Ecclesiastes 9:8; Daniel 7:9**); the robes of the righteous (**Revelation 19:8**); horses (**Zechariah 1:8; Revelation 6:2; 19:11 KJV**); forgiven sins (**Psalms 51:7; Isaiah 1:18**); a refined remnant (**Daniel 11:35; 12:10 KJV**); The beloved one (**Song of Solomon 5:10 KJV**); the white of an egg (**Job 6:6**); the shining garments of angels (**Revelation 15:6 KJV**) and of the transfigured Christ (**Matthew 17:2**) hair (**Matthew 5:36**); gravestones (**Matthew 23:27**); and the great throne of judgment (**Revelation 20:11**). Portrays purity, righteousness, and joy, and a white horse symbolizes victory.

**Yellow**- Indicates the greenish cast of gold (**Psalms 68:13 KJV**) and the light-colored hair in a leprous spot (**Leviticus 13:30, 32**)

***"Come now, and let us reason together," Says the LORD, "Though your sins are as scarlet, They will be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They will be like wool. Isaiah 1:18***