

view, based on the pattern of the history of David, who went barefoot on the mount of Olives when he fled from Absalom (2 Sam. 15:30), this verse in Zechariah would not be associated with the day of the Lord's actual coming. It would instead reflect an event which would occur during the work of the establishment, perhaps taking many years, of the Kingdom. We appreciate that such a view may not be acceptable to many; but we submit that a detailed study of these last six chapters of Zechariah, pointing repeatedly to the pattern of the history of the former kingdom of David, should be carefully considered.

New Testament quotations

There is another feature of these chapters which has to be taken into account. There are in fact four quotations in the New Testament taken from these chapters, all of which have reference to the circumstances surrounding the death of Jesus. These concern:

- the entry into Jerusalem (9:9; Mt. 21:4,5; Jno. 12:14,15)
- the selling of Jesus for thirty pieces of silver (11:12,13; Mt. 27:9,10)
- the looking on the pierced one (12:10; Jno. 19:37)

- the smiting of the shepherd and the scattering of the sheep (13:7; Mt. 26:31).

The very fact that they are spread over all these chapters helps to confirm the idea that the chapters present a closely developed theme.

If these chapters in Zechariah are pointing to certain incidents in the history of the Kingdom of God in the past, as we are suggesting, then it is striking that these quotations can each be associated with a death, or near death, occurrence. Without going into detail, the associations are as follows:

- the riding into Jerusalem with the near death and resurrection experience of Hezekiah
- the price of the prophet (thirty pieces of silver) with the drama of Jeremiah being put in the pit by those seeking to be rid of him
- the mourning for the only son with the death of Absalom
- the smiting of the shepherd with the perilous time that David suffered at the hands of Absalom.

Each of these connections obviously needs evidence to support it, which would require more space than is available to us here, but for those who are interested it is an enlightening study.

Metals in the Bible

3. Silver (Part 2)

Peter Hemingray

IN [PART 1](#) WE looked at how silver was refined and at Biblical passages where the figure of refining is used. We conclude our look at silver by considering its uses.

Money a synonym for silver

The connection between money and silver in the Bible is quite intimate. Most commonly, when we see the term 'money' in our English Bible, the Hebrew or Greek is the same as for silver. We know that gold and silver were used as a medium of exchange well before Abraham; he came back from Egypt rich in cattle, gold and silver (Gen. 13:2). There was no system of coinage then, nor would there be until after the exile, but these metals were cast into convenient forms such as bars or rings for use as exchange.

However, the pieces were not accurate enough to pass for money without weighing, as we see

in the case of the transaction between Abraham and the children of Heth: "And Abraham hearkened unto Ephron; and Abraham weighed to Ephron the silver, which he had named in the audience of the sons of Heth, four hundred shekels of silver, current money with the merchant" (23:16). Notice that Abraham weighed the silver; this transaction indicates the common use of silver as currency, for it was "current money with the merchant". Earlier we have the mention of the use of silver by Abraham as money: "He that is born in thy house, and he that is bought with thy money [Heb. silver]" (17:13).

Ornaments of silver and gold were apparently made to the shekel weight, so that they might be used for money in emergency. So Abraham's servant gave a gold ring to Rebekah of half a shekel weight, and gold bracelets of ten shekels' weight (24:22). The bundles of money

carried by the sons of Jacob to Egypt for the purchase of corn were probably silver rings tied together in bundles (42:35). Indeed, the Hebrew word for 'talent', *kikkar*, signifies something round or circular, suggesting a ring of this weight to be used for money. As we have said, the ordinary term for money was *kesepeh*, silver, and this word preceded by a number always refers to money, with or without the use of the term 'shekel'. Thus the value of the field of Ephron was in shekels, as was also the estimation of offerings for temple purposes (23:15; Lev. 5:15).

Other forms of the precious metal were sometimes used. The Hebrew *ksitah* is used for money, and is translated by the Septuagint as 'lambs'. It is used in Genesis 33:19, Joshua 24:32 and Job 42:11, and would seem to indicate the use of silver (or gold) cast into the form of a lamb.

We have to come down to the times after the exile before the use of coined money began. We read in Ezra 2:69 that "they [the Jews] gave after their ability into the treasury of the work three-score and one thousand darics of gold, and five thousand pound of silver" (RV). Darics usually represent gold coins; the term is also to be found in Ezra 8:27 and Nehemiah 7:70-72.

Money in the New Testament

In New Testament times, as in the Old, money was still almost invariably silver, although the metals copper and gold also circulated. The most common term translated money is still 'silver' (Greek *argyrion*), see Luke 9:3, Acts 8:20, etc. The following are the coins referred to in the New Testament (for completeness, bronze coins are included at the end):

- The basic Greek coin was the **drachma**, mentioned only in Luke 15:8, where it is translated "pieces of silver". The woman in the parable may have worn these as an ornament.
- The **two-drachma** piece was used to pay the half-shekel required for the annual temple tax (Mt. 17:24). It seems most likely that the coin used for this was from Tyre, as Talmudic law forbade the use of the Antiochene money for the temple treasury, simply because it did not contain enough silver!
- The Greek **stater** is found only in Matthew 17:27, where it is the coin which would pay the temple tax for Jesus and Peter. It was a more common coin than the two-drachma, and it would appear that the Jews frequently paid the temple tax in pairs. It seems most

likely that these were the coins that Judas received for his thirty pieces of silver.

- The basic Roman coin was the silver **denarius**, consistently rendered 'penny' by the translators of the AV, owing to the fact that the British used 'd' for denarius as the abbreviation for a penny. It was, according to Matthew 20:1-16, the daily wage for a labourer, and the good Samaritan paid two denarii to the innkeeper (Lk. 10:35.) It was also the coin used to test Jesus in the question concerning the payment of tribute money. Silver denarii of the time have been discovered with the head of the Emperor Tiberius on one side and his mother Livia, in the role of 'peace', on the other. It has also been suggested that these coins were minted for the sole purpose of paying the tribute tax, which would make Jesus's words, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's" (Mt. 22:21), even more appropriate.
- The only Jewish coin mentioned is the bronze **lepton**, the widow's mite of Mark 12:42. It was one half of the Roman quadrans (see below) and stands for the smallest coin imaginable. Such coins were minted locally, and Pilate appears to have produced designs calculated to offend the Jews.
- The smallest Roman coin was the **quadrans**, and Matthew 5:26 uses this (translated 'farthing') as the smallest coin that must be paid to clear a debt in full.
- The copper **assurion** was four times the value of the quadrans, and about one-sixteenth a silver denarius in value. It occurs in Matthew 10:29 and Luke 12:6 (translated 'farthing'), where it is used as the price at which sparrows were sold.

Silver in the tabernacle and temple

God said to Moses:

"Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring Me an offering: of every man that giveth it willingly with his heart ye shall take My offering. And this is the offering which ye shall take of them; gold, and silver, and brass [copper or bronze], and blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine linen, and goats' hair, and rams' skins dyed red, and badgers' skins [sealskins, RV], and shittim wood [acacia wood, RV], oil for the light, spices for anointing oil, and for sweet incense, onyx stones, and stones to be set in the ephod, and in the breastplate. And let them make Me a



Oldest existing Biblical writing

Two small 2,600-year-old silver scrolls were found in a tomb on the shoulder of the Hinnom Valley in Jerusalem in 1979. When the scrolls were unrolled, they were found to be thirty-nine millimetres and ninety-seven millimetres in length respectively. The Aaronic or priestly blessing of Numbers 6:24-26 had been engraved by hand with the ancient Hebrew script on the thin silver plaques, which were then rolled into scrolls, known as amulets. They were worn around the neck, with a leather strap, close to the heart. They contain the word YHWH (the Name of God in Hebrew), and are the oldest known documents containing God's Name.

sanctuary; that I may dwell among them” (Ex. 25:2-8).

Leaders had to be found to superintend the work, and they were chosen by God: Bezaleel, son of Uri, and Aholiab, son of Ahisamach. They were men of wisdom, understanding and knowledge, skilled in working in gold, silver and brass, in cutting stones and in woodcarving. Their skills were added to by their being filled with the Spirit of God.

Bezaleel was from the tribe of Judah, which always led the way when the Israelites moved forward. Aholiab was of the tribe of Dan, which “was the rereward of all the camps throughout their hosts” (Num. 10:25). Bezaleel and Aholiab are the only ones specified by name, but all their skills would have been useless if they had not enjoyed the support—practical and financial—accorded to them by men and women far too numerous to mention by name.

The various metals and fabrics are mentioned again in outlining the requirements for the tabernacle as laid down by God. An interesting fact emerges from a consideration of the metals. They occur in an ascending scale:

Court: brass and silver

Holy place: silver and gold

Most holy place: pure gold alone

Silver clearly represents redemption in this context. In the course of the Divine instructions for the making of the tabernacle it was ordained that every man of twenty years old and upwards should make an offering to the Lord of half a shekel for atonement or ransom money.

These contributions were appointed “for the service of the tabernacle of the congregation” (Ex. 30:11-16).¹

Silver was used in large quantities in the decoration of the tabernacle, to the tune of “an hundred talents, and a thousand seven hundred and threescore and fifteen shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary” (38:25). Most of this silver was used for the fittings, the “sockets” of the wooden boards and the pillars of the tabernacle’s structure. Silver was also used for some of the vessels for worship (Num. 7:13, etc.) and the two silver trumpets that summoned the worshippers (10:2).

Silver was used in even greater abundance in Solomon’s temple; we are told that silver was “nothing accounted of in the days of Solomon” (1 Kgs. 10:21). David had prepared for the house of the Lord a million talents of silver, the booty of his wars against the nations round about (1 Chron. 22:14). Vessels, tables, candlesticks, instruments and basins were all made of solid silver (28:14-17), and “refined silver” was used to overlay the walls of the temple (29:4). Silver was also the primary means of collecting money for the support of worship from the earliest times. It was part of the trespass offering (Lev. 5:15).

Lead in the Bible

There are only eight direct references to lead in the Old Testament, and none in the New. In most of them its use is associated either with its

1. Based on F. E. Mitchell, “There was a Tabernacle Made”, *The Christadelphian*, Vol. 112, 1975.

weight or (as discussed in [Part 1](#)) with silver refining. As lead is easily extracted from its ores, its use is very ancient, but its lack of strength, its relatively low cost, and the fact it was not used for decoration, meant its significance was low.

As is well known, lead is one of the heaviest metals, and its low cost meant it was used as a sinker for fish-nets, fish-hooks or sounding lines. Moses mentions the sinking qualities of lead in his simile of the sinking of Pharaoh's hosts "as lead in the mighty waters" (Ex. 15:10). The use of lead is implied in the references to plumb lines in Amos 7:7,8 and Zechariah 4:10, and to a sounder in Acts 27:28, and its use as a weight is mentioned in Zechariah 5:7,8.

But perhaps the most interesting, though obscure, reference to lead is in Job 19:23,24: "Oh that my words were now written! oh that they were printed in a book! that they were graven with an iron pen and lead in the rock for ever!". There are two possible alternative explanations as to what is being referred to here, either to the use of lead to fill letters which had been chiselled into the rock, or to a lead tablet being inset into a rock face and the letters written on the tablet. From a metallurgical point of view, we cannot think of lead being used as an alloy with iron to make a 'lead pencil', for lead vaporises at far too low a temperature.

Symbolic references to silver

There are not many Biblical references to silver as a symbol. Including passages where 'silver' in the original is translated as 'money', there are well over 400 Biblical references to silver, but the vast majority are to the use of decorative silver or to silver as a means of exchange. However, the natural properties of silver—its lustre, value, and difficulty of refining—all lend themselves to occasional symbolic use, and I will survey the more significant passages. I will not, however, cover the symbolic uses of money.

Abundance of silver a symbol of great wealth.

Great abundance of silver is used as a sign of great affluence and prosperity. Examples of such passages are:

- "And the king [Solomon] made silver to be in Jerusalem as stones" (1 Kgs. 10:27)
- "princes . . . who filled their houses with silver" (Job 3:15)
- "thou shalt have plenty of silver" (22:25)
- "heap up silver as the dust" (27:16)
- "for iron I will bring silver" (Isa. 60:17).

The direct correspondence in Old and New Testament times between silver, money and wealth makes this metaphor very easy to understand.

The trying of man likened to the refining of silver.

In Psalm 66:10 we read: "For Thou, O God, hast proved us: Thou hast tried us, as silver is tried". We have described at some length in [Part 1](#) the arduous steps required to refine silver, the skill and persistence involved and the heat of the furnace needed, and expounded a number of passages where this symbolism is used. The way in which, if successful, the smith is rewarded by the sight of the brilliant glow of pure, valuable silver emerging from out of the black dross of slag typifies the effort and reward of God when His dealing with man produces a pure, moral man. It is also frequently said that the refiner knows when the process is complete when he sees his own image in the silver, a beautiful analogy of our lives. However attractive the idea, it is unfortunately quite incorrect technologically, as anyone will attest who has witnessed the process. The molten silver is brilliant, it is true, but it emits its own light, it cannot act as a mirror.

Pure silver as an analogy for pure speech.

In Proverbs 10:20 we read: "The tongue of the just is as choice silver". Choice silver is silver refined several (seven?) times, and would normally be polished and lustrous. The owner of such silver would be proud of it, and would also be able to see his own reflection in it. Thus the speech of the just is a reflection of his or her character.

Silver on the wings of a dove.

In Psalm 68:13 we read: "Though ye have lien among the pots, yet shall ye be as the wings of a dove covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold". This is somewhat obscure, but the message could be that while Israel wanted to take their ease asleep at a campfire (the word "pots" appears to refer to cooking stones), the Lord would ensure that they would return loaded with wealth, the silver and gold, and in security as well, if we take the dove to be a symbol of peace.

Silver as corruptible. In our modern society we are aware that silver discolours and tarnishes fairly easily, but that is only because the atmosphere contains sulphur, which attacks silver. In New Testament times this happened much more slowly, if at all, and hence silver and gold were

regarded as stable and eternal. Yet James and Peter state:

“Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days” (Jas. 5:3);

“forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers” (1 Pet. 1:18).

The very fact that silver and gold do not rust in normal human lifetimes, nor are easily corruptible, renders the metaphor of the eternity and stability of God even more strong.

Conclusion

The identification of silver with money, with all that this implies and has meant down through the ages, has rendered the study of silver very illuminating, interesting, and, it is hoped, of considerable spiritual benefit. The pursuit of silver has, in a physical sense, caused much suffering; when we pursue it in the present time we do so to our peril. Better that we search for the things that are truly incorruptible rather than for silver, which, although a noble metal, can most surely perish. And better that we refine our speech for ourselves than suffer the refining fire of Him who knows our thoughts as well as our words.

[\(To be continued\)](#)

Update on archaeological discoveries

Tony Benson

THIS ARTICLE gives an update on three recently claimed archaeological discoveries with Biblical connections, two dealt with before, the other a newly emerging story.

The James ossuary

The alleged discovery of a stone ossuary (a box for holding the bones of the deceased) bearing the inscription, “James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus”, caused a great stir when the story emerged in late 2002.¹ Later in the year, however, the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA), after ordering a detailed investigation of the find, announced that the inscription was a fake but the ossuary genuinely ancient. The home of the owner of the ossuary, Oded Golan, was raided by the police, who said they had discovered sophisticated forging equipment in his home.² Controversy continues to rage, however. The following are the main points in the controversy:

1 The man who originally stated that the inscription is genuine is a distinguished epigrapher (an expert in ancient inscriptions) called André Lemaire. The man who was largely responsible for giving the ossuary such wide publicity was Hershel Shanks, an American Jew who edits the popular archaeological magazine, *Biblical Archaeology Review*. Both continue to claim that the ossuary and inscription are genuine. However, both stand to lose both face and credibility if they admit it is a forgery after all.

2 The IAA might be thought to be a reasonably impartial organisation but in practice seemed to have appointed experts in various fields who were predisposed to declare the inscription a fake. Moreover, the methods used, the thoroughness of the investigations and the resultant findings have all been challenged by various other experts in the same fields. There are three reasons why the IAA might be predisposed towards declaring the inscription a fake:

- pique because Shanks launched the details of the discovery (if such it was) upon the world without informing them
- a desire to discourage the trade in artefacts illegally looted from sites
- a lack of enthusiasm as Jews for an artefact which, if genuine, supports the authenticity of Christianity.

3 One might think the finding of what was described as a forging laboratory in Oded Golan’s home settled the matter. However, Golan says that what was discovered was used to clean and restore genuine antiquities, not to forge them, and he has yet to be brought to trial. A programme on Israeli television

1. “Archaeological evidence for the existence of Jesus”, Tony Benson, Mar. 2003, p. 102.

2. “Biblical ‘finds’ appear to be fakes”, Tony Benson, Sept. 2003, p. 355.