

Gold!

Gold! The mere mention of this shiny yellow metal brings a twinkle to the eye! My wife Tricia and I have been blessed to be able to visit three of history's major gold producing areas: California, Alaska and South Africa. I will mention just two of them here:

The first one I would like to mention is the spectacularly beautiful country of South Africa which Trish and I visited in 2009. Gold, which is still one of South Africa's chief exports, was first discovered there in 1884. The lust for gold was one of the factors that triggered the Anglo-Boer war of 1899-1902. South Africa is still the world's number-one gold-producing nation, with an annual production of over 272 metric tonnes. Since their first minting in 1967, South African Krugerrands have been valued worldwide by gold bullion speculators and collectors.

The United States ranks fourth in annual gold production, following South Africa, China and Australia. Gold mining in the United States has taken place continually since the discovery of gold at the Reed farm in North Carolina in 1799. The first documented occurrence of gold was in Virginia in 1782. Some minor gold production took place in North Carolina as early as 1793, but created no excitement until the discovery on the Reed farm in 1799. US gold production greatly increased during the 1980s, due to high gold prices and new production methods.

In the spring of 2008, along with our children and grandchildren, Trish and I visited another gold producing area – Alaska and the Klondike area of Canada's Yukon Territory. This is perhaps the most romantically well-known gold rush country! Alaska, which is second only to Nevada in US gold production, still yields 23 metric tonnes per year.

We visited Juneau, Alaska's capital city, which was founded on gold and the quest for it. We also visited Skagway, known as "the Gateway to the Klondike," an area where much gold was found. We rode the railway which follows the old miners' tortuous trail route over the White Pass to the Yukon.

113 years ago in 1898, more than 40,000 people swarmed into this area in their lust for gold and riches. Of this 40,000, less than 20,000 actually got down to the business of looking for gold; less than 4,000 actually found gold; less than 100 became what we would call "wealthy"; and only twelve remained wealthy. These statistics contain an obvious lesson for us all!

The purpose of this article is to examine the subject of gold – but from the viewpoint of God's holy Word.

The Scope of the Subject of Gold in the Bible

Just what does God's Word say about gold? It has *much* to say about gold! In fact, there are 419 mentions in the King James Version, and the topic appears from the very beginning of the Bible to its very end. Here is the very first mention:

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 Pison {which means "increase"}: that is it which compasses the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold; and the gold of that land is good. (Genesis 2:10-12)

And here is the final mentions, which appear in the Bible's second to last chapter:

And he that talked with me had a golden reed to measure the city, and the gates thereof, and the wall thereof... and the building of the wall of it was of jasper: and the city was pure gold, like unto clear glass... and the twelve gates were twelve pearls; every several gate was of one pearl: and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass. (Revelation 21:15, 18, 21)

In this article, we will glean some of the most spiritually-important biblical points on the subject.

Grades of Gold

In Bible times, gold was a commonly known emblem of purity. God's Word often mentions its different purities and grades. For example, gold's first mention in Genesis 2:12, which we have already read, we are told that "the gold of that land is good." This implies that, from the very earliest days of mining, there was gold of "good" quality, which implies that there was also other gold that was considered less good.

Verses 18 and 21 of Revelation 21, which we have also read already, both mention "pure gold," implying that there might also such a thing as impure or less-pure gold. And this is very true. Here is a quote from the Wikipedia article on the subject of gold:

Pure gold is too soft for ordinary use and is typically hardened by alloying with copper or other base metals... The gold content of gold alloys is measured in carats (k), pure gold being designated as 24k... The Canadian Gold Maple Leaf Coin contains the highest purity gold of any popular bullion coin, at 99.999%.

Different Bible Words for Gold

Let us take a quick look at the different Hebrew and Greek words used in the Bible and translated into the English word “gold.” First of all, here are the five Hebrew words:

i) Zahab

This is the most frequently used Hebrew word for “gold” in the Bible. It comes from a root word meaning “to shimmer” and is translated in the King James Version (KJV) as “gold” or “golden.” It refers to gold as a precious metal and as a measure of weight. In other places, it refers to gold’s brilliance or splendour.

ii) Madhebah

This word is translated in the KJV as “golden city” and implies boisterous, raging behaviour. It might allude to gold fever – the mind-altering effect the metal has on some people. An example of this might be the lawless behaviour of many residents of the Alaskan towns of Juneau and Skagway and the South African gold mining towns of the 1880’s and 1890’s.

iii) Betzer

This word, also simply translated in the KJV as “gold” refers to precious “gold earth.” This would be like the ore that Alaskan and South African miners dug out of ground or the nuggets panned from streams.

This term “betzer” also refers to something called “ring-gold.” Anciently, gold was not minted into coins, but rather into rings. (In the second century BC, the Hebrew prince, Simon Maccabeus was the first to have gold struck into coins to be used as Jewish money). In some Egyptian tombs, gold is shown as having been weighed out in the form of rings of various fixed weights.

iv) Segore or Sagur

This word refers to an enclosure, an encasement, or to “fine gold.” It can also be translated as “treasured gold” and, from this, can refer to the aspect of nobility. This Hebrew word leads me to a side-point which is of personal interest to our family. My wife, Tricia’s maiden name is “Saggers,” which stems from a very old Norse Viking name “Saegar,” which literally means “Sea-spear,” but came to have the meaning of “nobleman” or “nobility.”

v) Charuts

This word, literally meaning “dug-out gold,” can also refer to sharpness, diligence, or strict decision-making. The Hebrew pronunciation is strikingly similar to our English term “carats” which, as mentioned earlier, is the modern measure of the purity of gold.

All the New Testament Greek words for gold are very similar to one another and they all stem from the word **Chrusos**, and refer to:

- Precious things made of gold,
- Golden ornaments,
- Images made of gold,
- Stamped gold and gold coins,
- Things overlaid or covered with gold,
- Gold lying imbedded in the earth,
- Gold dug out of the earth,
- Gold smelted and wrought,
- Gold rings, or adorned with gold rings.

Spiritual Gold

How does the Bible use gold symbolically? What is its spiritual antitype? Various Bible scholars and commentators opine that gold symbolizes kingship, purity, virtue, goodness (especially that derived from love or faith), wisdom (especially that originating from divine truth), and knowledge (especially the knowledge of spiritual things).

These are all true, of course, and we will come back to some of them as we continue; but throughout the Old and New Testaments, we read about the good and bad aspects of gold – the positive and the negative.

God does not condemn gold of itself. Nor does He condemn man's attraction to or liking for it – or even man's desire for it, as long as that desire is kept in moderation and under control.

God commanded that gold be used in the building of His earthly houses. Much gold was used in the decoration of His tent-tabernacle and the later stone temples. Gold adorned both the insides and the outsides of these structures. The Jewish historian, Josephus, wrote that, when the sun was shining in the right direction, the sight of the temple was absolutely blinding. It may be that one of Jesus' disciples caught such a glimpse of the brilliant buildings when he was inspired to utter this exclamation:

Then as He went out of the temple, one of His disciples said to Him, "Teacher, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here!" (Mark 13:1)

The gold of God's temples certainly was renowned throughout the ancient world. Various rulers, both Gentile and Israelite, took it upon themselves to pillage and to make profane use of it. Some examples of their misuse can be seen in II Kings 18:16; 24:11-13; Daniel 5:2-3; and Joel 3:4-5. The temple gold was misused in other ways too:

Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'Whoever swears by the temple, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple, he is obliged to perform it.' Fools and blind! For which is greater, the gold or the temple that sanctifies the gold? (Matthew 23:16-17)

The spiritually foolish and blind, including the scribes and the Pharisees began to swear by the temple gold. This was rank idolatry, and Jesus told them so. He told them that what – or rather *Who* – sanctified the gold of the temple was much more important and valuable than the gold itself. Later, Paul, one of Jesus' apostles was inspired to agree with his Master on this point:

For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire. (I Corinthians 3:11-15)

Jesus is the only foundation that we should build upon. Any other foundation – even a gold one – will, in the long run, show its value for what it really is. An example of building on a gold foundation is the world's use of the "gold standard," a monetary system in which the standard economic unit of account is a fixed weight of gold. As we will see later in this article, man's gold standard may well be a valid link to Babylon the Great, the Great Whore of Revelation 17 and 18.

Do we depend on our Krugerrands, our Canadian Maple Leaf gold coins, or our United States Double Eagle coins, or our "junk silver" to save us from the end time trials? If we are not very careful, any gold and silver that we might possess can become a curse to us:

Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you! Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver are corroded, and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have heaped up treasure in the last days. (James 5:1-3)

Any physical riches – even including gold – are relatively unimportant in the big scheme of things. As James mentions here, even gold and silver can corrode. Yes, it is true that gold *is* pretty durable. But it is not totally indestructible. It is a very soft metal and can be broken down by certain chemicals. Here is another quote from our Wikipedia article:

Gold does not react with most chemicals, but is attacked by chlorine, fluorine, aqua-regia and cyanide. Gold dissolves in mercury.

God inspired the apostle John, when writing the book of Revelation, to frequently use gold as a symbol. It is mentioned twenty times in the book. Let us just look at one of those mentions – a significant one for God’s people today:

And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; “These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God; ‘I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot: I would you were cold or hot. So then because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of my mouth. Because you say, “I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and know not that you are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked,” I counsel you to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that you may be rich..... (Revelation 3:14-18)

Christ counsels His Laodicean church to buy refined gold from Him. Why? For what purpose? To heal our poverty and to become truly rich.

Can anyone deny that we are now in the Laodicean era of God’s church? What about you? Do you claim to be rich, increased with goods, and in need of nothing?

Yes, most of us living in the western democracies certainly *are* rich – physically – in comparison with most of the world. Just look at us – how we enjoy so many luxuries! Yes, we *are* increased with goods – physically! A few years ago, Tricia moved from our former family home to a much smaller one and, in so doing, we downsized our living space by fifty percent. At that time we realized how increased we goods we really were – and still are!

But are we really “in need of nothing”? Perhaps many of us do not consider ourselves physically needy at this time. But how suddenly this could change – especially in the event of war, severe drought, or an even worse economic downturn, etc.

What is this “gold” that we are commanded to buy from Jesus? Was He referring to gold bullion coins? Krugerrands? US Double Eagle coins? UK gold sovereigns? Canadian gold Maple Leaf coins? Is this what Jesus is commanding here?

Maybe such purchases are not such a bad idea. They *may* help us through a temporary economic downturn – at least one that has a recovery at its far end. But in the long term, gold bullion and junk silver will not save us – neither physically nor spiritually! Let us see what God warns us in this regard through His apostles and prophets:

And the rest of the men which were not killed by these {trumpet} plagues yet repented not of the works of their hands, that they should not worship devils, and idols of gold, and silver, and brass, and stone, and of wood: which neither can see, nor hear, nor walk: (Revelation 9:20)

It is incredible that most of the people who survive the plagues to this point still refuse to repent – especially of their idolatry to gold, silver and other dumb idols. Still later, after the destruction of the Great Whore (Babylon the Great), amazingly, the lustful yearning for gold and other physical baubles, which will then be totally worthless, still continues:

And the merchants of the earth shall weep and mourn over her; for no man buys their merchandise any more: the merchandise of gold, and silver, and precious stones, and of pearls, and fine linen, and purple, and silk, and scarlet, and all thyine wood, and all manner vessels of ivory, and all manner vessels of most precious wood, and of brass, and iron, and marble... and saying, “Alas, alas, that great city, that was clothed in fine linen, and purple, and scarlet, and decked with gold, and precious stones, and pearls!” (Revelation 18:11-12, 16)

This will be the lament of the world’s merchants because of the destruction of the Great Whore, who had been bedecked with gold, etc. and had helped bring great riches to them. Because of her downfall, no one buys this merchandise anymore – including gold, silver and precious jewellery. The gold standard will collapse and will be worthless!:

They will throw their silver into the streets, and their gold will be like refuse; their silver and their gold will not be able to deliver them in the day of the wrath of the lord; they will not satisfy their souls, nor fill their stomachs, because it became their stumbling block of iniquity. (Ezekiel 7:19)

What is God's Gold and Treasure?

So again, what is the “gold” that Jesus commands us to buy of Him? First let us ask these two related questions: Is *physical* gold really valuable to God who created it? And if it is not, what *is* really valuable to Him? What is His true treasure? Perhaps surprisingly, there are multiple inspired answers from various Bible authors:

In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honour, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ. (I Peter 1:6-7)

God inspired the apostle Peter to write that our faith and its genuineness are truly precious to God. What else is valuable to Him?

Then they that feared the LORD spoke often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon His name. “And they shall be mine,” says the LORD of hosts, “in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spares his own son that serves him.” (Malachi 3:16-17)

Jesus’ brothers and sisters are His true treasure – those who fear Him, those who think on His name; those who serve Him; those who speak often to one another. But speaking *what* to one another? God’s words – the Word of God:

A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver. As an earring of gold, and an ornament of fine gold, so is a wise reprovener upon an obedient ear. (Proverbs 25:11-12)

These precious words would also include the prayers of God’s saints:

And when He had taken the book, the four living creatures and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints. (Revelation 5:8)

These golden vials (or bowls) appear to be spiritual antitypes of the dishes and bowls of pure gold that God commanded to be made for His tent-tabernacle and stone temple (Exodus 25:29; 37:16; I Kings 7:50; II Kings 25:15; I Chronicles 28:17; Jeremiah 52:19).

The twenty-four elders carry these golden bowls, full of incense, symbolic of the prayers of God’s people. These precious, golden containers are for the safekeeping of things that are very precious to God.

Yes, these things are God's treasures. But what are *our* treasures? Or rather, what *should* they be? What is the "gold" that Laodicean era church members need to buy from Jesus? Is it the physical basics – food, clothing and shelter? Jesus says not!

No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble. (Matthew 6:24-34)

Yes, the true treasure that we should be seeking is the Kingdom of God. Here it is again:

Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man has found, he hides, and for joy thereof goes and sells all that he has, and buys that field. (Matthew 13:44)

What else might be considered hidden treasure – true treasure to which only God Himself can give access?

For I want you to know what a great conflict I have for you and those in Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh, that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ, in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. (Colossians 2:1-3)

Again, it is the Kingdom of God, the knowledge of it and true wisdom. These are the things that constitute the true gold and treasure of Jesus Christ. Is there anything else? Yes!

And I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried: they shall call on my name, and I will hear them: I will say, it is my people: and they shall say, the LORD is my God. (Zechariah 13:9)

High heat is used to refine and purify gold, after which it is tested, or tried, to determine its level of purity. For the people of His church, God uses the heat of trials to purify us, following which He tests us to determine *our* subsequent levels of purity. Moses was inspired to understand that such trial, correction, purification and testing were far more valuable than the physical baubles of the world:

Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he {Moses} had respect unto the recompence of the reward. (Hebrews 11:26)

All of these things constitute the true “gold” that Jesus commands us to buy of Him. We must not just consider them as being *God’s* treasures. They must be *our* treasures too. When we buy them, we must take full ownership of them:

Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust does corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust does corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. (Matthew 6:19-21)

So, whether we are Alaskans, South Africans, Americans, Canadians, or citizens of any other place on earth, we are first of all citizens of the Kingdom of God and, as such, we are not to lust for physical gold. Our treasure must not be physical gold or any other kind of physical wealth. If and when it becomes necessary, we must be willing to give it all up.

Our true treasure must be the “gold” that Jesus commands us to buy from Him – His Kingdom, His Word, His true wisdom and knowledge, His way of life, and yes, if necessary, His beneficial correction, trials and reproach.

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