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The Harlot's Missing Color



By Dan Maines

The Harlot's Missing Color

Introduction

† One of the most fascinating details in Revelation 17 is the clothing of the harlot.

† John describes her wearing purple and scarlet, adorned with gold, precious stones, and pearls.

† At first glance, this appears to be a picture of wealth and royalty, but when compared with the Old Testament priesthood, another possibility emerges.

† The harlot appears to be dressed like a counterfeit priesthood.

† Yet one color stands out by its absence, blue.

† Could the missing blue thread reveal something important about her identity?

Numbers 15:38-40

Speak to the sons of Israel and tell them that they shall make for themselves tassels on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and that they shall put on the tassel of each corner a violet thread. It shall be a tassel for you to look at and remember all the commandments of the LORD, so that you will do them and not follow your own heart and your own eyes, which led you to prostitute yourselves, so that you will remember and do all My commandments and be holy to your God.

† God specifically connected the color blue with remembering and obeying His commandments.

† The blue cord was intended to remind Israel to remain faithful to the covenant.

† Notice that God immediately connects covenant unfaithfulness with harlotry.

† The warning was against following their own desires instead of God's commandments.

† The very passage that introduces the blue thread also warns against becoming a harlot.

Exodus 28:5-6

They shall take the gold, the violet, the purple, the scarlet material, and the fine linen.

"They shall also make the ephod of gold, of violet, purple, and scarlet material, and fine twisted linen, the work of the skilled embroiderer.

† The high priest's garments included blue, purple, scarlet, gold, and fine linen.

† Blue was not a minor detail, it's an essential part of the priestly garments.

† The priest represented covenant faithfulness before God.

† Every color carried significance within the worship system established by God.

† Blue was present because God's law and covenant were central to Israel's relationship with Him.

Exodus 28:15-21

You shall make a breastpiece of judgment, the work of a skilled embroiderer; like the work of the ephod you shall make it: of gold, of violet, purple, and scarlet material, and fine twisted linen you shall make it. It shall be square and folded double, a span in length and a span in width. And you shall mount on it four rows of stones; the first row shall be a row of ruby, topaz, and emerald; and the second row a turquoise, a sapphire, and a diamond; and the third row a jacinth, an agate, and an amethyst; and the fourth row a beryl, and an onyx, and a jasper;

they shall be set in gold filigree. The stones shall be engraved according to the names of the sons of Israel: twelve, according to their names; they shall be like the engravings of a signet, each according to his name for the twelve tribes.

† The high priest's breastplate contained gold and precious stones.

† Revelation's harlot is likewise adorned with gold and precious stones.

† This is another remarkable connection between the woman and priestly imagery.

† John is not describing an ordinary woman.

† He is presenting a religious figure clothed in symbols associated with the priesthood.

Revelation 17:4-6

The woman was clothed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold, precious stones, and pearls, holding in her hand a gold cup full of abominations and of the unclean things of her sexual immorality, and on her forehead a name was written, a mystery: "BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH." And I saw the woman drunk with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus. When I saw her, I wondered greatly.

† Notice the striking similarities to the priestly garments.

† Purple, scarlet, gold, and precious stones are all present.

† Yet blue is completely absent.

† The woman appears religious and priestly on the outside.

† She possesses the outward appearance of covenant privilege.

† But she lacks the very color associated with remembering and obeying God's commandments.

† Instead of faithfulness, she is filled with abominations and fornication.

† Instead of preserving the saints, she is drunk with their blood.

Jeremiah 51:7

Babylon has been a golden cup in the hand of the LORD,
Intoxicating all the earth.

The nations have drunk of her wine;

Therefore the nations are going insane.

† The golden cup in the harlot's hand is rooted in Old Testament imagery.

† John deliberately draws from Jeremiah's language.

† The cup represents corruption, intoxication, and judgment.

† The woman presents herself as holy, yet what she offers is spiritual corruption.

† The cup is golden on the outside but filled with abominations on the inside.

Isaiah 1:21

How the faithful city has become a prostitute,
She who was full of justice!
Righteousness once dwelt in her,
But now murderers.

† The Old Testament repeatedly describes Jerusalem as a harlot when she becomes unfaithful to God.

† The language of Revelation did not originate with pagan Rome.

† God had long used harlot imagery to describe covenant-breaking Jerusalem.

† Jerusalem was once called the faithful city.

† She later became identified with spiritual adultery and bloodshed.

Matthew 23:28

So you too, outwardly appear righteous to people, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

† Jesus condemned the religious leaders for appearing righteous while being corrupt within.

† The harlot follows the same pattern.

† Her outward appearance suggests holiness and covenant privilege.

† Her inward condition reveals lawlessness and rebellion.

† The missing blue thread fits this contrast perfectly.

Matthew 23:34-37

Therefore, behold, I am sending you prophets and wise men and scribes; some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will flog in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city, so that upon you will fall the guilt of all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. Truly I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who have been sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling.

† Jesus identified Jerusalem as the city responsible for the blood of God's messengers.

† Revelation identifies the harlot as drunk with the blood of the saints.

† The connection is difficult to ignore.

† The woman wears priestly colors but behaves like an apostate harlot.

† She claims covenant privilege while rejecting covenant faithfulness.

Revelation 18:24

And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all who have been slaughtered on the earth.

† Revelation places the guilt for the blood of the prophets and saints upon the woman.

† Jesus placed that same guilt upon Jerusalem.

† Both passages describe the same blood guilt.

† Both passages point to the same covenant-breaking city.

† This further strengthens the identification of the harlot as apostate Jerusalem.

Historical References

† Josephus described the corruption of the priesthood and leadership in Jerusalem during the years leading to AD 70.

† Josephus recorded violence, murder, and lawlessness within Jerusalem while the city still maintained its religious appearance.

† Eusebius recorded that the judgment Jesus predicted upon Jerusalem came to pass in that generation.

† Early Christian writers consistently viewed Jerusalem's destruction as divine judgment for rejecting Christ and persecuting His followers.

How It Applies To Us Today

† God has never been impressed by outward religious appearance alone.

† It's possible to possess the appearance of faithfulness while living in rebellion.

† The harlot reminds us that external religion cannot replace obedience to God.

† We should examine whether our profession matches our practice.

† True faithfulness is not found in religious clothing, titles, or ceremonies.

† True faithfulness is found in trusting and following the Lord.

Q & A Appendix

Q: Was the absence of blue in Revelation 17 intentional?

A: Scripture never directly states why blue is absent, but the contrast is striking. The high priest's garments included blue as a symbol connected to remembering God's commandments (**Numbers 15:38-40; Exodus 28:5-6**). The harlot wears similar priestly colors while lacking blue, which may symbolize covenant unfaithfulness.

Q: Why identify the harlot with Jerusalem instead of Rome?

A: The Old Testament repeatedly calls Jerusalem a harlot (**Isaiah 1:21; Ezekiel 16:2, 15**). Jesus also held Jerusalem responsible for the blood of the prophets and saints (**Matthew 23:34-37**). Revelation uses the same language of blood guilt and harlotry.

Q: If the harlot represents Jerusalem, why is she dressed like a priest?

A: Jerusalem was the covenant city, home of the temple, priesthood, sacrifices, and religious leadership. The harlot's attire reflects her religious identity. She appears holy outwardly while being spiritually unfaithful inwardly.

Q: Why is the absence of blue significant?

A: Blue was associated with remembering God's commandments and was part of the high priest's garments (**Numbers 15:38-40; Exodus 28:5-6**). The harlot wears nearly every priestly color except the one associated with covenant faithfulness, making the contrast especially striking.

Q: What is the main lesson of the missing blue thread?

A: The lesson is that outward religion without covenant faithfulness is empty. The harlot looked religious but had abandoned obedience to God. God desires faithfulness, not merely appearances.

† This is the fulfilled perspective we proclaim at Fulfilled Prophecies †

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Source Index

† Numbers 15:38-40; Exodus 28:5-6; Exodus 28:15-21; Revelation 17:4-6; Jeremiah 51:7; Isaiah 1:21; Matthew 23:28; Matthew 23:34-37; Revelation 18:24

† Josephus, Wars of the Jews; Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History

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