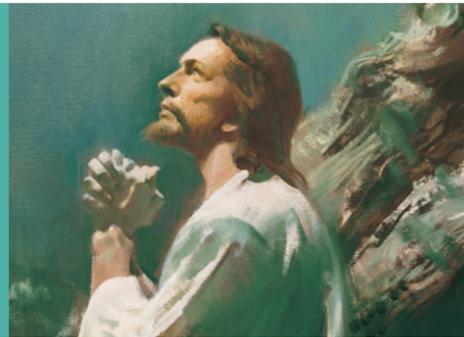


Scarlet, Crimson, Snow, and Wool

Through the prophet Isaiah, we learn of the power of the Savior's Atonement.

“Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.”

Isaiah 1:18



Scarlet, Crimson

In Isaiah 1:18, the words *scarlet* and *crimson* refer to red colors that come from certain dyes. Ancient cultures placed great importance on dyes, especially those used for sacred or ceremonial purposes, such as burial clothing or purification rituals (see Leviticus 14:6). The point of a dye is that it is not only colorful but also *colorfast*, meaning that its rich color will stick to the cloth and not fade or wash away.

Scarlet and crimson are:

Bright red. Because of the vibrancy of their redness, they are emblems of standing out. Red has a strong psychological effect on people, and it can be reminiscent of blood, which is sometimes a symbol of guilt. Our sins can be grievous and obvious.

Permanent. The colorfast nature of scarlet and crimson dyes is similar to our sins, and “the Lord cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance” (Alma 45:16). “According to the great plan of the Eternal God there must be an atonement made, or else all mankind must unavoidably perish” (Alma 34:9).



ONE OF THE SWEETEST FRUITS OF THE GOSPEL

“I testify that the Savior is able and eager to forgive our sins. Except for the sins of those few who choose perdition after having known a fulness, there is no sin that cannot be forgiven. What a marvelous privilege for each of us to turn away from our sins and to come unto Christ. Divine forgiveness is one of the sweetest fruits of the gospel, removing guilt and pain from our hearts and replacing them with joy and peace of conscience.”

Elder Neil L. Andersen of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “Repent . . . That I May Heal You,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2009, 40–41.

BIBLE FACT

The Hebrew words for scarlet (*shani*) and crimson (*tola*) signify where the colors were derived from—a worm (most likely *Kermes echinatus*).

The scarlet or crimson worm is of a family of insects that live on oak trees. Its lifespan is about 4–14 weeks. For about the last four weeks of its life, the female is ready to be fertilized and lay eggs. She then attaches firmly to the oak tree and produces a red dye, which stains her body as well as her eggs.

Just before the eggs were to hatch, these female insects were gathered, dried, and boiled. Alum was added as a mordant (a chemical that helps the dye stick to the cloth by combining to form an insoluble compound), and the resulting dye was used to make red-colored cloth.

ANOTHER BIBLE FACT

On the cross, the Savior quoted Psalm 22:1: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34). A later verse of this messianic psalm states, “I am a worm, and no man” (Psalm 22:6). The Hebrew word used here for “worm” (*tola’at*) refers specifically to the crimson worm.



Snow, Wool

Snow is rare but not unheard-of in most areas of Israel. But, for instance, in the northern part of the country, Mount Hermon is covered in snow every winter (there’s even a ski resort there today). Wool was one of the most common fabrics in ancient Israel, and raising sheep was a common occupation. To make it a purer and brighter white in preparation for dyeing, wool was commonly soaked and washed in a strong soap.

Snow and wool are:

Pure, bright white. White represents purity. When Isaiah says that the Lord can change our sins from scarlet or crimson to snow or wool, he is saying that the Lord can do something that is impossible for us to do on our own. A cloth dyed red stays red. But regardless of the stain of our sins, the Atonement of Jesus Christ can make us pure again if we repent. “All are within the reach of pardoning mercy, who have not committed the unpardonable sin” (*Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* [2007], 76).