

**Sermon Notes** February 2, 2020

**Focus:** Malachi: What and who shapes you?

**All Lectionary Readings**

I want to talk about two things from Malachi: gold and wool. The prophet's book is a vision of a purified people, a purified temple, and a world organized around God's holiness. We will look at Malachi's images in context.

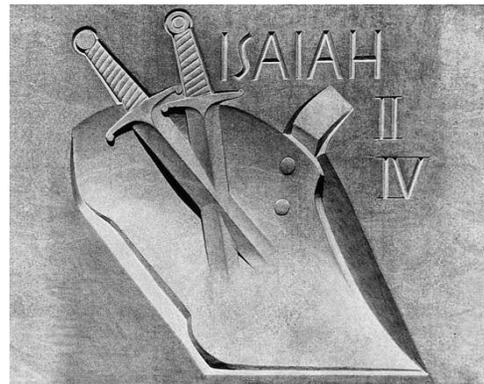
**Malachi's first image — the refiner's fire for gold**

Metal working analogies are found all over scripture. Gold gets great biblical press. While Malachi doesn't talk about iron in today's passage, I think it's a good contrast to understand the point Malachi is trying to make. Biblically, iron is a metal of war and buildings. Iron is often an image of spiritual inflexibility. Gold is biblical symbol of spiritual malleability/meltability and purity.



**Science note:** Melting point of iron is 2786 F and gold is 1946 F. The higher melting point of iron has a real world impact on the Bible. In ancient times, they did not have the technology to get the temperature high enough to melt iron. So, iron had to be *beaten*, while gold could be *melted* and poured into forms. Biblical writers made a lot of hay from what they saw in these metals.

**Science 2.0 note** - iron still had to be heated to be beaten, even if it couldn't be directly melted. Think of those old timey pictures of a blacksmith with anvils and hammers. Isaiah has a wonderful image of swords being beaten into plowshares. Iron is an ambivalent metaphor, while gold is always an *unalloyed* good - pun intended.



**Deep dive**

- *Iron as a Bible topic*  
<https://www.biblestudytools.com/concordances/torreys-topical-textbook/iron.html>
- *Gold as a Bible topic*  
<https://www.biblestudytools.com/concordances/torreys-topical-textbook/gold.html>
- General resource on metal in the Bible  
[https://jbnqnew.jewishbible.org/assets/Uploads/304/304\\_metal.pdf](https://jbnqnew.jewishbible.org/assets/Uploads/304/304_metal.pdf)

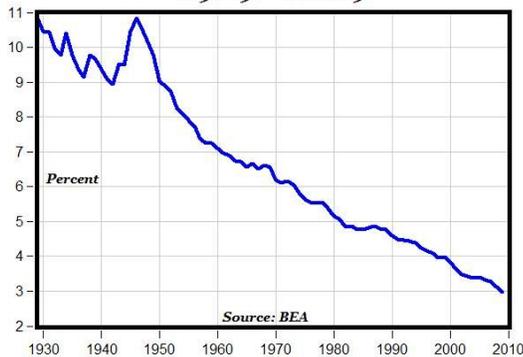
**Second image - Fuller's soap (for raw wool).** Before the wool can be dyed and spun, a fuller (a person) must remove the oil and gummy substances that sheep naturally produce. The raw wool is soaked and sprinkled with powdered ash, aka fuller's soap. It's not like the soap we think of in your shower.



The wool is then beaten with rocks or spanked with a paddle. Then, the treated, beaten cloth is soaked in a river where small children step on the wool and the ash flows downstream. This process is called a "foot fountain" or "fuller's fountain."

After drying, the wool is ready to be spun, dyed, etc. Fuller images are not just in the OT - In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus' transfiguration clothes became whiter than any fuller on earth could whiten them (Mark 9:3).

### Clothing Expenditures: Share of Disposable Income 1929 - 2009



**Economic nerd note:** the percentage of total income that the ancients spent on necessities like clothes was far more than we spend today. This makes sense when you think about all the labor that went into making a simple wool garment. So, if you think your clothes are expensive, that doesn't come close to the percentage of income spent on clothes in Bible times.

In the last hundred years alone, What we spend on clothes (as a share of disposable income) has dropped dramatically. We live extravagant lives and don't know it.

**So what?** Both the images of wool and gold are images of effort and *workability*. They are meant to evoke how we can submit to God's purifying action. It may take a little bit of trampling or turning the heat up, but God seeks our own good and flourishing and by extension, the disciplines that prepare us for the heat are worth our time.

**Up in your business** - what are the things in your life that turn the heat **down**? How can you avoid those wet blankets? I am convinced that God wants to shape us, mold us, and purify us. I'm pretty certain there's something you are doing that pours cold water on the fire of God inside you. We have a role to play in this. With God's help, can you clear the way for God to "Fuller's Soap" and "Refiners Fire" you? May you have the grace to enjoy the heat! **Todd**