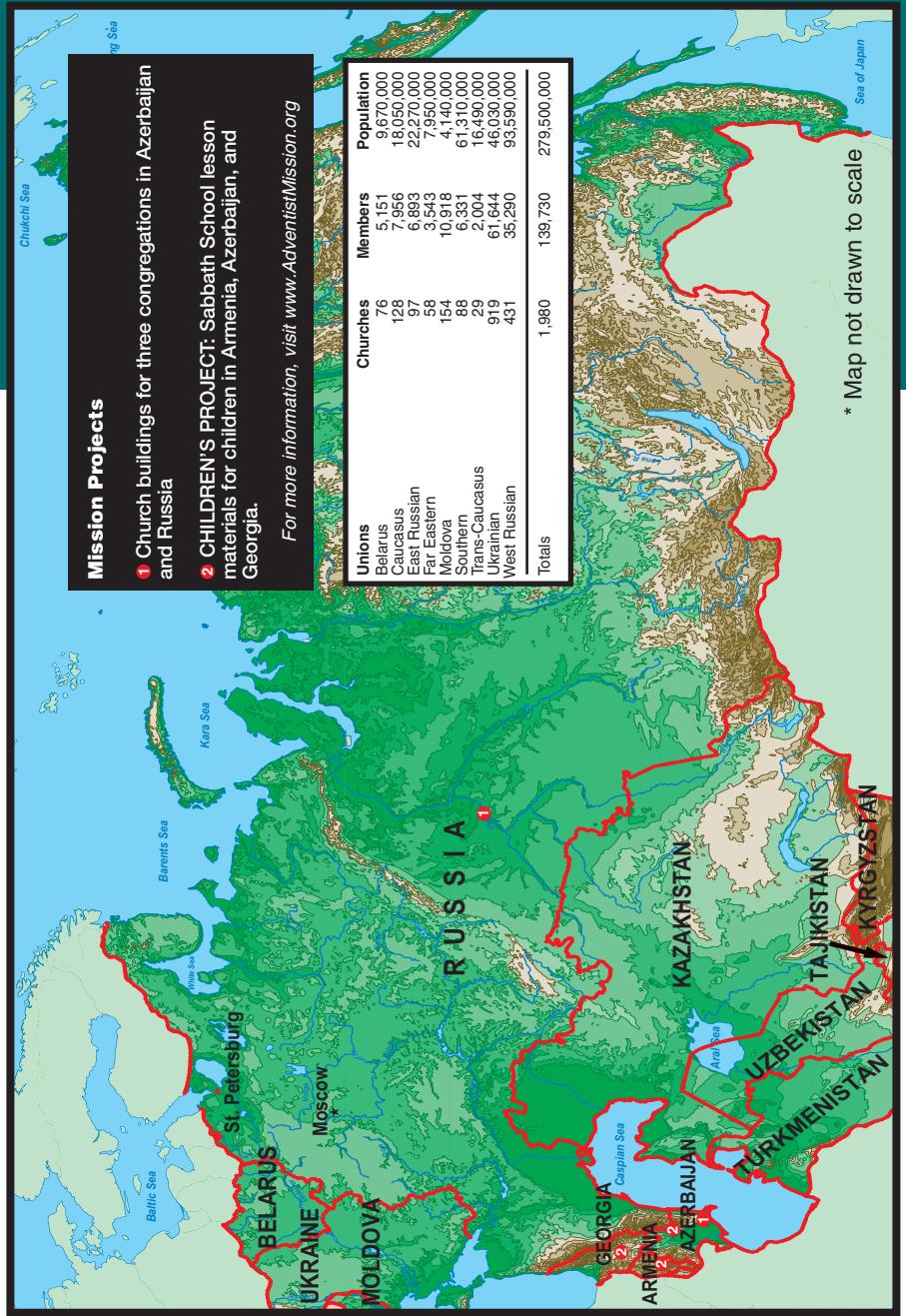


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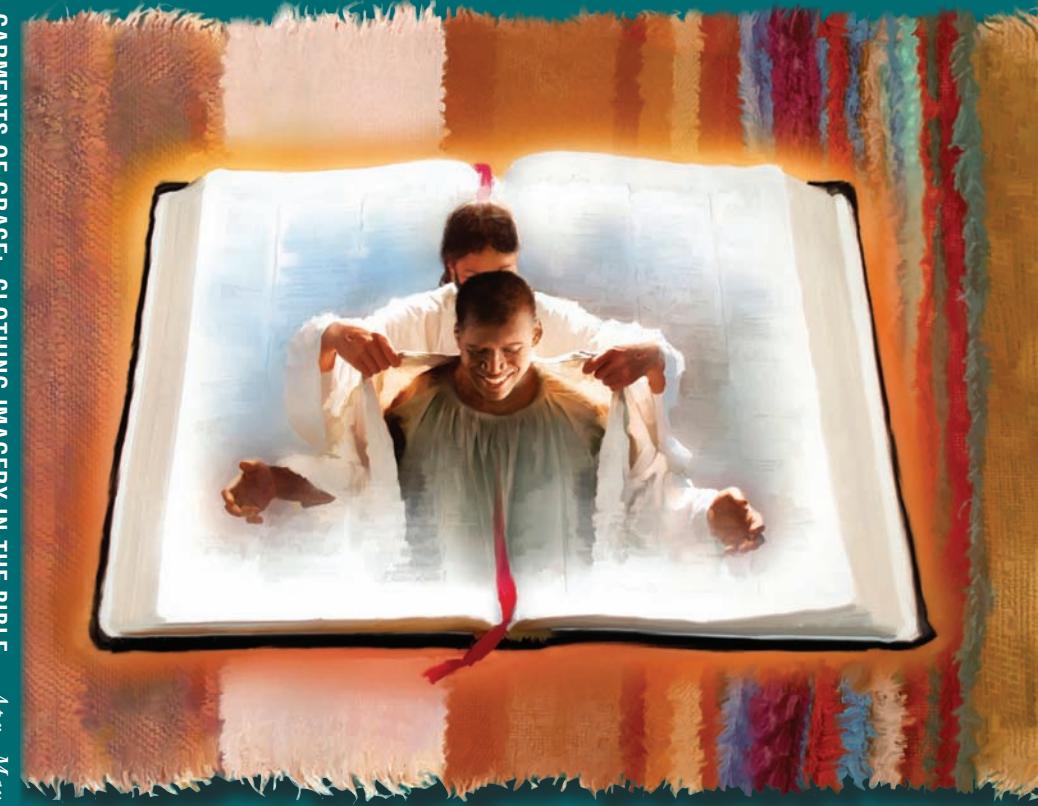


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ADULT  
SABBATH SCHOOL  
BIBLE STUDY GUIDE  
Apr • May • Jun 2011

# Garments of Grace

*Clothing Imagery in the Bible*



ADULT SABBATH SCHOOL BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

GARMENTS OF GRACE: CLOTHING IMAGERY IN THE BIBLE

Apr • May • Jun 2011

SEVENTH-DAY  
ADVENTIST CHURCH



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## A THING BIGGER THAN ITSELF

**W**e are awash in symbols. Our language, our words (hence our thoughts, even) are symbols, representations of things other than themselves. The letters of the word *dog* aren't a dog or *any* dog. They're a symbol, composed of type on a page, made of letters and sounds that, no matter how construed, never can be what they stand in for. The word *dog*, in every tongue and script, represents something bigger than itself.

Language, culture, society, politics—everything to some degree—come to us filtered through symbols: flags, icons, pictures, slogans, idioms, art, poetry, sculptures, dance, architecture, rituals, and customs, with meanings often varying from place to place. So many things mean more than what they, in and of themselves, are.

Maybe that's why the Bible is awash in symbols, as well. In Genesis 2, God made the seventh day a symbol of all that came before it, the six days of Creation. The first gospel promise, the first promise of salvation for the fallen race, was revealed in symbols: seed, head, heel (*Gen. 3:15*), all referring to a reality much greater than seeds, heads, and heels. Then, too, when He said to the murderous Cain, “the voice of thy brother’s blood crieth unto me from the ground” (*Gen. 4:10*), the Lord Himself was speaking in symbols.

All through the Bible, symbols, representations of things and ideas bigger than themselves, appear—the rainbow after the Flood (*Gen. 9:13*), Joseph’s dreams (*Gen. 37:1–11*), the three angels of Revelation 14 (*Rev. 14:6–12*), the entire sanc-

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tuary service of the Old Covenant period (*Hebrews 9*), the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper (*Mark 14:22–25*). They all point to realities and truths beyond themselves.

Of course, as Seventh-day Adventists, we're all familiar with the prophetic symbolism of Daniel: a winged lion (*Dan. 7:4*), a beast with iron teeth (*Dan. 7:7*), a goat that "touched not the ground" (*Dan. 8:5*), a statue with feet of iron and clay (*Dan. 2:33*). Again, all these are symbols of greater realities.

Then there's the powerful symbolism of biblical poetry: "Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance?" (*Isa. 40:12*). Or something as simple as "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver" (*Prov. 25:11*).

And the parables Jesus told? The lost sheep (*Luke 15:1–6*), the rich man burning in hell (*Luke 16:22–31*), the marriage supper (*Matt. 22:1–13*), and the ten virgins (*Matt. 25:1–13*) all are symbolic representations of concepts that, in their essence, have little or nothing to do with their symbols. (Christ came to give eternal life to a fallen race, not to find lost farm animals.)

This quarter's lessons focus on biblical symbolism of a certain kind: clothing imagery. (We give special thanks to Myrna Tetz for this concept. Myrna, now retired, was managing editor of the *Adventist Review*.) We will consider the garments that people in the Bible wore and what that clothing really meant, what truths it symbolized, what great realities it pointed to, and what lessons we can learn from it. From the fanciful adornment of Lucifer in heaven to the filthy rags of our own righteousness, from the coats of animal skins for Adam and Eve in Eden to the "garments of splendor" mentioned in Isaiah, the Bible uses clothing and clothing imagery to portray truths about sin, pride, righteousness, salvation, justification, resurrection, and eternal life in Christ.

Though we're not what we wear, what we wear can say much about who we are. In that sense, as with all symbols, garments can point to something greater than themselves.

*All through the Bible, symbols . . . appear. . . . They all point to realities and truths beyond themselves.*



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# In *the Loom of Heaven*



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Isaiah 64, Rom. 3:21–31, 4:1–7, 6:1–13, Phil. 3:3–16.*

**Memory Text:** “‘Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered’” (*Romans 4:7, NIV*).

Christ is the sinner's substitute and surety. He has obeyed the law in the sinner's place, in order that the sinner may believe in him, and grow up into him in all things to the full stature of a man in Christ Jesus, and thus be complete in him. Christ has made reconciliation for sin, and has borne all its ignominy, reproach, and punishment; and yet while bearing sin, he has brought in everlasting righteousness, so that the believer is spotless before God. The time comes when it is asked, ‘Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?’ and the answer is, ‘It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again.’ He who has the spotless robe of righteousness, woven in the loom of heaven, in which is not a thread that sinful humanity can claim, is at the right hand of God, to clothe his believing children in the perfect garment of his righteousness. Those who are saved in the kingdom of God will have nothing of which to boast in themselves; the praise and the glory will all flow back to God, the giver of salvation.”—Ellen G. White, *The Youth's Instructor*, Dec. 6, 1894. Notice the imagery: a robe of righteousness, a *spotless* robe of righteousness, “woven in the loom of heaven” and with not a thread of sinful humanity stitched in anywhere. What a wonderful image of the righteousness of Jesus, the righteousness that covers anyone and everyone who will be saved into His kingdom at last.

\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 2.

## Staring in the Mirror

It's a sad fact: not all Christians, or those professing Christ, have lived up to the high standards that their faith calls them to. This is a truth revealed, not just in the fall of some famous mega-evangelist or TV preacher but among all Christians.

Who hasn't been greatly disappointed in the actions of someone whom they looked up to as a role model? As they've gotten to know some "good" Christian really well, who hasn't seen faults and flaws that they never knew existed? Some who profess the name of Jesus do better than others, or at least appear to before others, but we all fall short.

What Christian, looking in the mirror, stares in the face of someone who is perfectly reflecting the character of Jesus? What Christian, no matter how faithful, staring in the mirror, can claim any kind of righteousness for himself or for herself? What Christian, staring in the mirror, isn't horrified by what he or she knows lurks beneath the surface?

**Read** Isaiah 64. What message is being proclaimed there? What garment imagery is used to describe human righteousness, and what does it mean? What hope is presented in the chapter, as well?

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The phrase "filthy rags" means a garment defiled by menstruation. What more powerful image could the Bible give to describe human righteousness after the Fall? The apostle Paul picks up on this theme in Romans 3, where he makes it clear that both Jews and Gentiles are in the same position before God: sinners in need of divine grace. Isaiah 64 may be seen as an Old Testament precursor to Romans 3, pointing out our dilemma as sinners and yet not leaving us without hope.

**When was the last time you took a deep look at yourself, your thoughts, your innermost motives, and your desires? What did you see? How scary was it? What is your only hope?**

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## Imputed Righteousness

No question, any honest Christian looking at himself or herself, particularly in contrast to the righteousness of God, especially as revealed through Christ, will see something pretty scary. Not much there to commend oneself toward God, is there? In fact, there's nothing at all, nothing but "filthy rags."

What hope, then, do we have? A great hope, actually, and the theological term for that hope is *imputed righteousness*. What does it mean? Very simply, it's the perfect righteousness of Jesus, the righteousness that was "woven in the loom of heaven" and granted to us by faith. "Imputed righteousness" means the substitution of His *sinless* life for our *sinful* life. It is credited to us, outside of us, and it covers us completely. We are viewed in God's eyes as if we have never sinned, as if we have always been completely obedient to God's commands, as if we were as holy and righteous as Jesus Himself.

**Read** Romans 4:1–7. How does Abraham's trust in God illustrate imputed righteousness?

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Paul said in Romans 4:2 that if Abraham were justified by works, he could have boasted. However, Abraham believed God, and therefore, he was accounted righteous. Jesus invites us to come to Him in simple belief, sinners though we are, and He will provide His robe of perfection, the perfect righteousness that He wrought out in His life while here in the flesh. That's known as imputed righteousness, and it's the only solution to the dilemma so graphically depicted in Isaiah 64 and Romans 3.

Imagine it like this: Jesus strips away your old stained garments, your filthy rags, and wraps you in the robe of His perfect righteousness, His perfect holiness, His perfect record of law-keeping. He wraps you in it and then whispers in your ear, "Now you are perfect. I have given you My perfection. Please wear this robe, and don't let it slip away from you."

**What is the greatest gift anyone ever gave you? How did the gift make you feel, especially if you didn't do anything to deserve it? How much more grateful should we be, then, for the gift of righteousness that Jesus offers us?**

## Without the Law

A preacher stood before a congregation and declared, “Jesus Christ has changed my life. I am a radically new and different person than I was before.

“However, after 25 years of being a Christian, if there is one truth that my experience has taught me—an experience judged and tested by the Word of God—it is this: if, in the end, I am to be saved, if I do indeed ‘endure to the end,’ as Jesus said, and I make it into God’s eternal kingdom, then there isn’t a doubt in my mind that it will be only because I am covered in the robe of Christ’s righteousness, a righteousness that is woven in the loom of heaven and that covers me completely. I can overcome sin, and through the grace of God I have had many victories; I can overcome character defects, and through the grace of God I have; I can learn to love all sorts of people, even my enemies, and through the grace of God I am learning to.”

“All that being said, I know that none of that is anywhere near good enough. Unless I am covered by the righteousness of Jesus, a righteousness credited to me by faith, apart from my obedience to the law, then at the end of the thousand years, you can stand on the wall of the holy city and wave down to me, because I know I won’t be there with you. I *can’t* be there with you.”

**Read** Romans 3:21–31. What is Paul saying here, and how are the ideas presented in these verses reflected in what the preacher above said?

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Though Paul was addressing a specific group with a specific issue, his point is relevant to everyone, Jews and Gentiles. Today, for us as Seventh-day Adventists who believe in the perpetuity of the law, it’s especially important. The righteousness that saves us, the righteousness that we as sinners need covering us like a garment, is a righteousness that has been made manifest “without the law.” In other words, it’s the righteousness of Jesus, the righteousness of His life, the righteousness that brings us “the redemption that is Christ Jesus.” The redemption is in Him, it is found in Him, not in ourselves or in our law-keeping, and this redemption becomes ours by faith.

**What has been your experience with law-keeping? Have you ever sensed that your best efforts at obedience were making you right before God? What are the implications of your answer? Bring your response to class on Sabbath and defend your position.**

## Clothes Make the Man

An author wrote a short story about two small-time crooks trying to pull off a robbery. In the plan, one of the crooks was to dress up in a policeman's uniform and stand in front of the place to be robbed. That way, with him there, no one would be suspicious while his partner pulled off the heist itself. The story ended, however, with the partner dressed as a policeman apprehending and arresting the other one. Dressed as a cop, he started to act like one!

This story makes a point relevant to our topic. Yes, by faith we are covered in the righteousness of Christ, His “robe of righteousness” as it is called. We now are born again and have a new life in Christ. No question, then, that our lives will reflect the garment that we wear.

In receiving Christ’s robe of righteousness, we have made a 100 percent commitment to let Him work His attributes of character into our lives. We are justified by grace, the work of a moment, and also have been given a power to obey that is assimilated over time and described as the work of a lifetime. Why would we ask for more? “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (*Phil. 4:13, NKJV*). Certainly that would mean, if nothing else, the power to obey His law.

**Read** Romans 6:1–13. What do these texts say about what kind of life we are to live, now that we are covered, “clothed,” by the righteousness of Jesus?

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Paul is very clear here about the radical, life-changing impact that will happen to someone who has “been crucified” with Jesus. Notice the life-and-death imagery here; there’s nothing halfway. Our old person, the person in those filthy rags, has died; a new person is born, one clothed in the righteousness of Jesus, a righteousness that is made manifest so that we can now “walk in the newness of life.” This newness means that we are no longer to let sin reign in us. We have been given many promises of victory; the question is, Will we claim them for ourselves?

**What aspects of your life reveal the reality of your experience with God? What areas are you struggling in? How can you make the choice daily to die to self and live the new life in Christ that is offered us?**

## Cheap Grace and Legalism

All through the Bible, the inspired writers emphasize the need for obedience. To think that it doesn't matter what we do as long as Christ lives in our hearts is a fallacy. If Christ truly lives in our hearts, good actions must, inevitably, follow. At the same time, it's no less fatal to think that we can be saved by our own works of obedience.

Paul wrote a very impressive list of his life, accomplishments, and pedigree before he met Jesus: he was circumcised on the eighth day, he was a descendant of Israel, he was a Pharisee, he had zeal, and he said he was faultless. Talk about legalism. After his conversion, he called these things rubbish compared to knowing Christ. He gained righteousness by accepting the robe of Christ's righteousness, and he wanted to become like Him.

**Read** Philippians 3:3–16. How is Paul expressing the great truth of salvation by faith and what it means in the life of the one saved?

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We must keep distinct, theologically, the imputed righteousness of Christ—the righteousness that justifies us—from the work that the Holy Spirit does in us to change us. We never must separate them in the context of what it means to be a Christian. We must have both. To have the first without the second is like having a coin with only one side. It doesn't exist.

The understanding that obedience comes as a gift keeps us out of two ditches: cheap grace and legalism. First, we will believe in the importance of obeying, and second, our obedience will not be meritorious because we will have received it as a gift. We are just as dependent upon Christ to obey the law and to be sanctified as we are on Him to be justified and forgiven before God. God is more than willing—He's eager not only to justify us but to give us the victory over sin and self. As always, the wild card remains our will: how willing are we to make the daily surrender of self to Him so that we “know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death”? (*Phil. 3:10, NIV*).

**Read over the texts again for today. Where do you see the reality of human free will? What does Paul mean in verse 16 when he says “let us live up to what we have already attained”? (*NIV*). What choices can you make that will allow you to do just that?**

**Further Study:** Read Ellen G. White, “The Testing Process,” pp. 88, 89, in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4; “Righteousness by Faith,” p. 161, in *Gospel Workers*; “Faith and Acceptance,” pp. 49–55, in *Steps to Christ*.

“The law requires righteousness,—a righteous life, a perfect character; and this man has not to give. He cannot meet the claims of God’s holy law. But Christ, coming to the earth as man, lived a holy life, and developed a perfect character. These He offers as a free gift to all who will receive them. His life stands for the life of men. Thus they have remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God. More than this, Christ imbues men with the attributes of God. He builds up the human character after the similitude of the divine character, a goodly fabric of spiritual strength and beauty. Thus the very righteousness of the law is fulfilled in the believer in Christ. God can ‘be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.’ Rom. 3:26.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 762.

### Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Read again the Ellen G. White quote given for Sabbath. Write out a paraphrase of what she is saying, and bring it to class on Sabbath. Listen to each other’s versions, and share your own. What main points come through?
- ❷ In class, discuss your answer to Tuesday’s final question.
- ❸ When we put on the robe of Christ’s righteousness, we “who . . . reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory” (see 2 Cor. 3:18, NIV). Describe what reflecting the Lord’s glory means.
- ❹ Over the years, some church members have struggled with the question of assurance of salvation. How are we to understand what it means to have assurance? Where is that assurance to be found? How does the imagery of a robe of righteousness woven “in the loom of heaven” without a thread of human devising help us understand where our assurance can come from? How can we know we’re not being presumptuous if we have that assurance?
- ❺ Why is it so important to maintain a theological distinction between what Christ has done for us, in that He justifies and forgives us the moment we claim it by faith, and what He works out in us over our lifetime? What dangers arise if we don’t keep that distinction sharp?

# No More Devil Sticks

Simon lives in Burundi in eastern Africa. He met a witch doctor who convinced him that he could have great powers. Simon put away his Bible and followed the witch doctor. He pounded sticks into the ground around his house to protect his family from evil spirits.

About this time Simon's friend Samuel attended some evangelistic meetings held by Seventh-day Adventists. He became convinced that he was hearing the truth and surrendered his life to Christ.

Samuel visited Simon and shared what he had learned at the meetings. He urged Simon to leave his witchcraft and follow Christ, but Simon refused. Samuel continued visiting his friend and sharing his faith. One day Samuel asked Simon, "What will be your future if you don't turn your life over to Christ?" Samuel's words pierced Simon's heart, but still he refused to leave his witchcraft.

On one visit Simon told Samuel that he must never eat sweet potatoes or peanuts that have been baked in a fire or he would die. Samuel answered, "I will eat those foods, and God will protect me."

Samuel went home and prayed that God would protect him as he showed his friend that God was stronger than the spirits. Then he returned to Simon carrying the forbidden foods. He put the food into Simon's cooking fire. The men talked as the sweet potatoes and peanuts roasted. Then Samuel pulled them from the fire and ate them. He didn't die; he didn't even look sick. Samuel told his friend, "You have seen for yourself that God is more powerful than the devils in which you trust."

That night Simon couldn't sleep. He found the Bible he had discarded and opened it at random to Hosea 4:12. There he read, "They consult a wooden idol and are answered by a stick of wood. A spirit of prostitution leads them astray; they are unfaithful to their God" (NIV). Simon trembled as he read God's words.

When Samuel returned, Simon told him, "I no longer trust in the sticks that surround my house. Please help me remove them." Samuel prayed, and the men removed the sticks. Then Simon accepted Samuel's invitation to worship with him on Sabbath. Simon and his wife attended the Adventist church that Sabbath and gave their hearts to God.

"We praise God for patiently calling us to follow Him," Simon says. "Now we invite others to come and learn this wonderful truth that Samuel shared with us."

Our mission offerings help support the work of lay evangelists and Global Mission workers such as Samuel and Simon in dozens of countries around the world.

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SAMUEL BAZIKWANKANA and SIMON BICURO are lay workers in eastern Burundi.

# From Exalted to Cast Down



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** John 1:1–3; Col. 1:16, 17; Ezek. 28:12–19; Deut. 8:1–18; Isa. 14:12–14; 2 Cor. 11:14.

**Memory Text:** “Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee” (Ezekiel 28:15).

Today’s memory text has to be one of the most profound in all revelation. Two crucial words stand out: *perfect* and *iniquity*, with the latter (*iniquity*) encapsulated by the former (*perfect*). What this means is that contained in the idea of being perfect, of having perfection—even in heaven!—is the potential for iniquity. How could iniquity be found in a being created “perfect” unless perfection allowed for it? Iniquity could not arise in a being created perfect unless being “perfect” included the possibility of it, which it obviously did.

What this text shows is that, in God’s universe, the concept of “perfect” includes freedom, moral freedom, the ability to choose right and wrong. How could it not and humans still be moral and free? A company might be able to program software that blocks employees from accessing Internet pornography or gambling or other immoral sites, yet no one would call the software itself “moral” or “free.”

What we have, then, is a being, Lucifer, so highly exalted that even his garments, his covering, are given special notice in Scripture, yet he abuses the freedom given him and falls away from the Lord.

What can we learn from his tragic mistake?

\*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 9.

## The Creator of All That's Been Made

Our God is the Creator. John 1:1–3 makes it clear that anything that was created, that is, anything that once didn't exist but then existed, did so only through the action of the Lord.

**Someone** once asked the question, “Why is there something instead of nothing?” It is perhaps the most basic of all questions that ever could be asked. Read John 1:1–3. How does it answer that question?

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This idea is interesting, too, in light of what is known as the big bang theory, which teaches that our universe, instead of being eternal, as many believed through the millennia, actually came into existence billions of years ago. Whether the theory turns out to be true or false, many have seen it as evidence for a God, a Creator, because a lot of science, a lot of physics, and a lot of math equations were needed for the big bang to have occurred. And, as one scientist asked, “Who breathed fire into the equations?”

We know the answer, don't we?

Scientists now speculate, too, that there are vast sections of the universe that we cannot see, which are filled with what is called dark matter and dark energy. What this should tell us, if nothing else, is that we are very limited in our view of what's really out there.

**Read** Colossians 1:16, 17. What else—and *who* else—has God created that, for the most part, are beyond what we can see every day? What lessons should we draw from this about how humble we need to be regarding our knowledge of reality?

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Notice, too, in those verses that not only were all these things created by God, they also were created “for Him.” What might that mean? How can we understand that? What should it mean for us to know that we, too, were created “for Him”?

## A Beautiful and Perfect Being

Among what was created by God, among what once didn't exist but then came into existence, was the angelic host. Chief among the host was the created being known as Lucifer, whose fall is recounted in Ezekiel 28 in the figure of the king of Tyre.

**Read** Ezekiel 28:12–19. What description is given to Lucifer? What kind of covering did he have, and what might that represent?

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Describing Lucifer as the “son of the morning,” Isaiah 14:12 records how God pictured him in his unfallen state. In Ezekiel 28:12 God described him as “thou sealest up the sum”; the word *sum* could be translated as “pattern” or “You set a seal to your completeness.” —*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 675.

Lucifer also carried the description of “day star” or “shining one” (*Isa. 14:12, ASV and NLT*). In Hebrew, *htlēl* (shining one) and its equivalents in related languages commonly were applied to the planet Venus when it appeared in unrivaled brilliance as the morning star.

Imagine wearing a garment, a covering, made perhaps of rubies, diamonds, topaz, beryl, onyx, jasper, sapphire, emerald, chrysolite, and turquoise mounted on gold. Even though we might attempt to visualize the colors of Lucifer’s covering (red, yellow, green, azure blue, turquoise, olive green), our earthly vision of the heavenly jewels and the majestic colors never would allow us to admire the robe as the angels could. As a heavenly being adorned in such splendor and with the highest position among them, Lucifer must surely have had the respect and affection of all the other angels.

The angels desired to do as they were bidden. They reflected the beauty of their Creator and praised Him for their privilege of living in a paradise of celestial harmony. Their constant praise for their Maker inspired an unselfish love for each other, and, as long as this was their only desire, they lived in a constant, unequaled, and loving environment.

In this heavenly environment, harmony, perfection, love, and adoration reigned—a picture that we, as human beings, can barely imagine.

**How could we imitate the heavenly environment with harmony, perfection, and love in our homes, workplaces, and churches? Discuss specific ways our earthly existence could better reflect our God’s glory and His love.**

## The Fall of a Perfect Being

However hard it might be for us, with our limited view of reality, to envision it, Lucifer must have been an incredible-looking being. Look at the description of him again in Ezekiel 28: wise, beautiful, dressed in all these majestic stones. He must have been something!

If we look carefully at Ezekiel 28:13, we can notice an interesting point. After talking about all these precious jewels that were his covering, the text says, “ ‘ ‘on the day you were created they were prepared’ ’ ” (NIV). Lucifer’s coverings, his garments, as they were, simply reflected his exalted position. As we’ll see throughout this quarter, garments can reveal a great deal about our station and position. Thus, if garments hint at anything, it was that Lucifer was an exalted and lovely being, one with power and influence.

**Read** Ezekiel 28:17. According to this text, what helped bring Lucifer’s downfall? What important message should we take from this for ourselves?

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The irony in all this is that however wonderful Lucifer’s coverings, however beautiful his person, however wise he was, where did it all come from? Of course, whatever Lucifer had, whatever he achieved, whatever the wonderful garment that covered him, it all was from God. Again, we are dealing with a created being: his covering, his beauty, and his wisdom were all gifts from God. Without the Lord, he would have had nothing and been nothing.

And yet, somehow, a being who lived closest to God forgot that important point.

**Read** Deuteronomy 8:1–18. What principle is found here that is reflected in what happened to Lucifer?

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How easy, especially in times of prosperity and wealth, to forget just how dependent we are upon the Lord for everything. What daily and practical things can we do to help us keep from falling into the trap of looking at our “beautiful garments”—our wisdom, our success, our prosperity, in whatever form these come—and forgetting just how dependent we are on the Lord for it all?

## Wanting to Be God

“ ‘ ‘You were on the holy mount of God; you walked among the fiery stones’ ’ ” (*Ezek. 28:14, NIV*).

Ezekiel used a figure of speech that represents the placement of God’s government or heaven itself. When Ezekiel described Lucifer on the mountain of God, his words showed the high position that God gave to this created being and the privileges that were granted him. Other instances in the Bible indicate that a mountain experience was of great meaning. For instance, Moses ascended a mountain to meet God (*Exod. 19:20*), and Jesus and three of the disciples met on a high mountain where Jesus experienced the Transfiguration (*Matt. 17:1, 2*).

In “Thou hast walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire” (*Ezek. 28:14*), again the prophet Ezekiel uses symbolism to indicate the presence of God: “stones of fire.” The Lord appeared to Moses, Aaron, and the other leaders in this way: “And they saw the God of Israel: and there was under his feet as it were a paved work of a sapphire stone, and as it were the body of heaven in his clearness” (*Exod. 24:10*).

In spite of all of Lucifer’s privileges, he allowed the wrong thoughts to enter and to fester in his mind, thoughts that eventually led to actions and to his rebellion and ruin.

**Read** **Isaiah 14:12–14**, another depiction of Lucifer’s fall. What principles are in play here, and what can we learn from them for ourselves amid our own temptations and struggles?

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The ancient Romans often believed that when an emperor died, he became a deity, which explains Vespasian’s dying words, “Oh, my, I think I’m becoming a god.”

The temptation to play God can be more subtle than most of us realize. When we judge people’s motives, when we take for ourselves prerogatives that don’t belong to us, when we seek to control others in ways that are inappropriate—are we not, in our own way, seeking to play God?

**Dwell more on the subtle ways we all might be in danger of seeking to put ourselves in the role of God. How might you have done the same thing? What is, really, the only cure for this dangerous but often subtle deception?**

## Satan on Earth

**“No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light” (2 Cor. 11:14, NASB).**

As we all know so well, Satan’s fall didn’t impact only heaven but affected earth, as well, and his fall and rebellion in heaven are manifested here on earth in what we call the great controversy. It’s real, it’s bitter, and it involves all of us.

**Read** Revelation 12:7–12. What is this passage talking about, and what caution—and at the same time, hope—can we take from these verses?

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Fortunately, because of the Cross, because of what Jesus completed for us there, we know how it will turn out in the end. Victory is assured for all who are covered in the robes of Christ’s perfection. Hence, Satan works diligently to try to keep as many as possible from finding the saving righteousness that guarantees them a place in eternity.

**Read** 2 Corinthians 11:14 again, paying close attention to the context in which Paul is writing. What important message should we take from this passage for ourselves?

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Satan works in various ways to deceive us, to turn us from a saving relationship with Christ, and he’s not averse to using other professed Christians to do just that. Indeed, that often can be his most effective ploy.

Spiritual danger lurks all around us (*1 Pet. 5:8*). The important thing for all of us to remember, however, is that we’re dealing with a defeated foe: the devil has lost, his ruin is sure, and his reign will end. Yet, in and of ourselves we cannot fight him and win. Our only hope and strength are found in the One who has defeated him already, and that is Jesus. His victory is ours, as long as we claim it for ourselves in faith and obedience.

**What are the subtle ways the devil can slowly but surely, step-by-step, undermine our faith if we are not careful? What day-by-day choices can we make to ensure that he doesn’t succeed?**

**Further Study:** Read Ellen G. White, "Why Was Sin Permitted?" pp. 35–43, "The Tabernacle and Its Services," p. 349, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*; "The Light of Life," p. 464, in *The Desire of Ages*. Read also *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, pp. 675, 676.

"When Satan seeks to cover the people of God with blackness, and ruin them, Christ interposes. Although they have sinned, Christ has taken the guilt of their sins upon His own soul."—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 169.

"Sin entered the world by the defection of one who stood at the head of the holy angels. What was it that wrought so great a change, transforming a royal, honored subject into an apostate? The answer is given, 'Thy heart was lifted up because of thy beauty; thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness.' Had not the Lord made the covering cherub so beautiful, so closely resembling his own image; had not God awarded him special honor; had anything been left undone in the gift of beauty and power and honor, then Satan might have had some excuse."—Ellen G. White, *General Conference Daily Bulletin*, March 2, 1897.

### Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Dwell more on the idea of morality and freedom. Can there be true morality apart from freedom? Are actions that are deemed moral really moral if they are forced, if they don't come from free choice? Discuss.
- ❷ No matter how much Satan had, it wasn't enough. In what ways do we find ourselves manifesting that same attitude? How can we stop ourselves from following down this ruinous path?
- ❸ In class, read over Revelation 12:7–12 and discuss what those texts mean in light of how we are to live, particularly verse 11: "And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death."
- ❹ Dwell more on the idea of how we can make ourselves out to be God. What does it mean? How might this trait be manifested in our lives without our even realizing it?
- ❺ Read again the first Ellen G. White quote above, about Christ taking our guilt upon Himself. What exactly does that mean? What hope can we take from that promise for ourselves? What will happen to those who refuse to believe that this promise is applied to them personally?

# Nagging Questions

by DANIEL SAFCIU

I grew up in Romania during Communist times. My parents were Seventh-day Adventists, and they risked everything to teach us about their faith and model Christian behavior. But in spite of their efforts and prayers, I chose to believe evolution rather than the faith my parents had taught me.

I lost my faith in God and stopped attending church, stopped obeying the Ten Commandments, and stopped keeping the Sabbath. I declared myself an atheist, which broke my mother's heart. I was uncomfortable being the only unbeliever in my home, so I left home and set out to escape from Romania. I slipped across the border in hopes of escaping the Communist world, but I failed repeatedly; and each time I tried, I was sentenced to time in prison.

Later I was caught stealing cars and was sent to prison again. There I met a doctor who was a political prisoner. I told him I didn't believe in God, and he said, "Why? Even Einstein believed in God." I wondered, *Is this man right? Does God really exist after all?* I began to wonder how such scientific phenomena as gravity and electromagnetic force could exist unless Someone created them. I prayed, "God, if You exist, help me believe." About this time, Communism fell in Romania.

Without warning I was sent to another prison. Two days after I arrived, a guard asked me, "Do you want to attend a small meeting for Christians?" I went, and to my surprise I recognized people I had known from the Adventist church during my childhood. One was my cousin. He gave me some books to read. One was on creationism and science. I read them and found answers to my questions. I continued attending the small group, and I felt God changing my life. I surrendered my life to Christ and was baptized after I was released from prison.

I joined a group who ministers to prisoners because I understood their situation and their needs. Today I work with former prisoners, helping them adjust to society, find housing and work, and make something of themselves. I'm raising funds to set up a book bindery and other vocational training programs for ex-convicts.

God has brought me full circle. I knew the truth but let it go; then I struggled with disbelief until I was willing to listen to God's voice again. Now I am helping others who've walked the same path as I have.

Your mission offerings are helping so many people find new meaning in life. I'm one of them.

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DANIEL SAFCIU is a carpenter. Originally from Romania, he now lives in Belgium.

# A Garment of Innocence



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** 2 Tim. 3:16, 17; Luke 21:36; Gen. 2:20–25; 2:15–17; 3:6–11, 21.

**Memory Text:** “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them” (Genesis 1:27).

As we have studied, Lucifer’s fall wasn’t limited to heaven. He has brought his wiles and deceptions to earth, as well. What’s amazing, too, is how successfully he has perverted the most obvious truths of God’s Word and has made millions believe the opposite of those truths.

For instance, Genesis is so clear: humans started out at the top of the earthly “food chain.” They were created, immediately, in the “image of God.” This image wasn’t something that evolved over billions of years from natural processes. Evolution teaches the opposite—that humans started out at a lower level (as microbes) and eventually, through a brutal process of violence and death, clawed their way up the food chain. Scripture, in contrast, teaches that humans started out at the top, in the image of God, and through sin began a steady descent.

This week, with some garment imagery that appears in Genesis, we’ll take a look at how that descent began and what the only solution is.

\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 16.

## The First Days

**Skim** through the first two chapters of Genesis. Try to imagine what this earth, fresh from the hand of the Creator, must have been like, a world untainted by sin. In what overt ways does our world today differ from what it was like back then?

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Adam and Eve were put in an environment beyond our wildest imaginations—a stunning home in a gorgeous garden with animals and other creatures as loyal friends. They reveled in the spectacular scenery, the scented flowers, the birds, and the animals, and in God's love and in their love for each other. They neither wanted nor needed anything more, and they tended the Garden as they were bidden by their Maker. Adam and Eve surely looked forward to their Master's visits as they strolled together in the Garden and actively communicated with Him. They knew that He loved them, and in return, their love for Him increased each day.

**Adam' and Eve's** connection with their Maker and their Master developed and grew through these cherished daily contacts, in a world that didn't know sin and the decay and devastation that sin always brings. How might we have a similar relationship with our Creator, but now in a world long corrupted by sin? See 2 Tim. 3:16, 17; Luke 21:36; Matt. 6:25–34; John 17:3.

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Adam and Eve held open-faced communion with the Lord, a privilege that we don't have now. However, we do have the privilege of living our lives in constant connection with the same God as did Adam and Eve. Sure, sin has gotten in the way. But through Jesus, who has connected heaven to earth with bonds that never can be broken, a way has been paved for us to live as closely and intimately with our Creator as is possible now.

**How intimately and closely do you walk with God? As you mull over your answer, ask yourself, What things am I doing that strengthen that intimacy, and what things break it? What choices must you make if you want a closer walk with your Lord?**

## Naked but Not Ashamed

It's very hard for us—whose concepts of the world, of reality, of everything, actually, are filtered and tainted and distorted by sin—to imagine fully the moral condition of Adam and Eve in Eden. These were people who knew no pain, no suffering, no deception, no betrayal, no death, no loss, and no shame, especially sexual shame (which is perhaps the most prevalent kind in a world so steeped in the consequences of sin today).

**Read** Genesis 2:20–25. What kind of close relationship and intimacy between Adam and Eve is revealed in these texts?

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As “one flesh” (*see Gen. 2:24*), Adam and Eve were close then, not only to God but to each other. The text is very clear, very unambiguous: they were naked and not ashamed (*vs. 25*). Talk about purity and innocence!

“The sinless pair wore no artificial garments; they were clothed with a covering of light and glory, such as the angels wear. So long as they lived in obedience to God, this robe of light continued to enshroud them.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 45.

Exactly what this light looked like, how it functioned, what its purpose was, we aren’t told. Only that, even with it, they still were deemed “naked.” The fact that they weren’t ashamed must have meant that this covering of light didn’t completely hide their nakedness, but in that sinless environment it didn’t matter, for no shame existed.

In a sense, the emphasis on nakedness seems to reveal the kind of physical closeness the sinless couple enjoyed. There was an openness, a transparency, an innocence about them and all that they did that allowed for this state of affairs. They lived in complete honesty, openness, and freedom before each other and before God. It was, after all, how the Lord had ordained it. How nice it must have been.

**How much openness and transparency exist in your own life? Or are you constantly hiding things, cutting moral corners, cloaking yourself in coverings that don't reveal what's really going on? (See Matt. 10:26.) If the latter, what aspects of your life must you start to change?**

## The Test

Last week's lesson talked about a crucial truth: the freedom that God allows all His moral beings. Again, without that freedom, they might be able to do moral things, in the same way that a house alarm that protects people from crime does something "moral," yet who would call the alarm itself moral? In the same way, beings who have no choice but to do the right thing aren't moral either. Only free beings can be moral ones.

A simple test was given to Adam and Eve, to see whether they would—in their freedom—obey the Lord. It was, in a sense, a time of probation for these free creatures. Freedom means just that, *freedom*, and they had to prove that they would do the right thing with the freedom given them.

**Read** Genesis 2:15–17, the probationary test given to Adam (and, eventually, Eve). Think about the environment in which this test was given. Why did that environment make their transgression that much more egregious?

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**Read** Genesis 3:1–4. Look carefully at what Satan said to Eve. What unfortunate truth did he mix in with all his lies?

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It's interesting that the tree was of both "good and evil." God, obviously, didn't want to keep Adam and Eve from good. Indeed, the whole world God had created, including them, was good, even "very good" (*Gen. 1:31*). It was from the knowledge of evil that the Lord wanted to spare them.

Which is not hard to understand, is it? Even in our fallen world, what parent doesn't want to protect his or her children from the knowledge of evil? How much more so, then, did God want to protect Adam and Eve from evil, from the knowledge of the one thing that would cause them to lose their garments of light and to know shame, suffering, and death?

Evil doesn't always come in blatant manifestations, which are so easy to see and detect and, often, avoid (after all, how many people are serial killers and the like?). There are, however, very subtle manifestations of evil. What might these be? How can we learn to identify these forms of evil and then to protect ourselves from them?

## A New Set of Clothes

As we know all too well, Adam and Eve failed their test, even one as simple as that. To call the results tragic would, of course, be the greatest understatement in human history. *Tragic* hardly conveys the horrible results of our first parents' disobedience.

**Read** Genesis 3:6–11. What was the first thing that happened to Adam and Eve (which is exactly what Satan, in verse 5, said would happen) after they fell, and what does that mean? What did it imply the results of their transgression were?

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Their eyes were opened, just as Satan said they would be, only now they were seeing the world and reality differently than they ever had before. All through those verses, the theme of their nakedness reoccurs. It's the controlling motif in the section. Their fall from innocence, their transgression, and their new relationship to God and to each other are all expressed in the theme of their now knowing that they are naked.

Notice, too, the Lord's question to them: “ ‘Who told you that you were naked?’ ” (vs. 11, NIV). It implies that in their innocence they never realized their nakedness, that it just seemed a natural way to be, and so they didn't give it any thought. Now, though, not only did they think about it, they were dominated by the shame that it brought.

**What** is the significance of Adam and Eve's response to their nakedness?

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Imagine Adam and Eve hiding behind some bushes, looking at themselves with mouths agape and attempting to cover themselves before the Lord. Looking at the possibilities for coverings, they must have decided that the fig leaves were the best. Thus, here we have the first lesson in salvation by works, in humans attempting to solve the problem of sin by their own works and deeds. As pathetic as their attempts were then, they are no more so than ours are today.

## Animal Skin

**“And the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins, and clothed them” (*Gen. 3:21, RSV*).**

Yesterday we saw Adam’s and Eve’s response to their sin; today we’ll look at God’s. In the above text, we have, in a sense, the gospel message prefigured.

First, we can see that Adam’s and Eve’s fig-leaf covering was not adequate. If it were, there would have been no need to kill innocent animals in order to clothe the fallen couple. In the same way, all our efforts to keep the law well enough to be saved are inadequate. If working our way to salvation were adequate, Christ would not have had to die for us. Just as fig leaves would have been less costly and traumatic than the death of innocent animals, so, too, our works would have been cheaper than the death of Jesus. In both cases, our works, fig leaves, couldn’t suffice; that’s why Jesus had to die for us; that’s why innocent animals needed to be slain. It could be no other way (*Gal. 3:21, Rom. 3:21–28*).

Second, what’s the main difference between fig leaves and animal skins? What inevitably comes from the latter that doesn’t from the former? Of course, the answer is blood. That alone should tell us how the gospel appears in Genesis 3:21 (*see Lev. 17:11; Rev. 12:11; 1 Pet. 1:18, 19; Heb. 9:22*).

Third, perhaps the most insightful part of the text is the last part, in which it says that “[He] clothed them” (*Gen. 3:21*). The Hebrew is clear: it was the Lord who placed the animal skins on Adam and Eve. It was His act, it was what He did for them that covered the shame of their nakedness. As we saw yesterday, the immediate consequences of their sin were revealed in the nakedness motif; now, however, God Himself solves the problem by clothing them Himself, in a covering made from innocent animals who were slain. The text says only that a “skin” covered them; it doesn’t tell us what kind. It might not be hard to make a correct guess, though, would it? (*See Gen. 22:8, John 1:36, 3:16*.)

Thus, right from the start, the Lord revealed the plan of salvation. However horrible Adam’s and Eve’s sin, it wasn’t greater than God’s grace to save them from it, a point we should never forget ourselves.

**Dwell on the wonderful promise of salvation by faith in Jesus. Dwell on the promise that our salvation is found in what He has done for us and not in what we can ever do for ourselves. How can we learn to make the promise of the gospel, of Christ’s righteousness as our own robe, the center and foundation of our lives and our walk with the Lord?**

**Further Study:** Read Ellen G. White, “The Creation,” “The Temptation and Fall,” and “The Plan of Redemption,” pp. 44–70, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

“The white robe of innocence was worn by our first parents when they were placed by God in holy Eden. . . . Nothing can man devise to supply the place of his lost robe of innocence. . . . Only the covering which Christ Himself has provided can make us meet to appear in God’s presence. This covering, the robe of His own righteousness, Christ will put upon every repenting, believing soul. . . . This robe, woven in the loom of heaven, has in it not one thread of human devising. Christ in His humanity wrought out a perfect character, and this character He offers to impart to us.”—Ellen G. White, *Maranatha*, p. 78.

“The Lord Jesus Christ has prepared a covering, the robe of his own righteousness, that he will put on every repenting, believing soul who by faith will receive it. . . . Then when the Lord looks upon the believing sinner, he sees, not the fig-leaves covering him, but his own robe of righteousness.”—Ellen G. White, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, Nov. 15, 1898.

### Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Read Genesis 3:6. What were the avenues to Eve’s soul that the devil was able to take advantage of in seeking to make her fall? How do these same things work for him today, as well?
- ❷ Dwell more on the centrality of nakedness in the Eden narrative. What else can we take from this idea that could help us understand what was going on there?
- ❸ Read the two Ellen G. White quotes in Friday’s study. How is the wonderful truth of the gospel revealed in those words?
- ❹ Look at Hebrews 5:14: “But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.” Dwell more on the whole question of evil. What do we mean by the term *evil*? Is it something that is always absolute and unchanging? Or is evil a relative term, in that what some cultures deem evil other cultures might deem good, or that what was once deemed evil in one culture now no longer is? How much does culture itself influence our concept of what is and isn’t evil? How can we step beyond our culture and know for sure what is good and what is evil? How are we to understand Isaiah 5:20: “Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter”?

# Seeing the Light

by FAUSTINO MENDEZ

Life for my family was hard. I sold bread on the streets of Veracruz, Mexico. But I used a good portion of my income to buy cigarettes and alcohol. Then one day a blind man stopped to buy some bread. Orestes was friendly and invited me to his house for a drink of water. After that he often stopped to talk to me.

Orestes loved to talk about God, and when he invited me to study the Bible, I agreed. My wife and I belonged to another church, and she didn't understand why I wanted to study the Bible with someone from another faith. But I told her I needed to know more about God, so she agreed to study with me.

My sister joined us for the Bible study, and we often talked about how our new knowledge of God was influencing our faith. But we hesitated to make a decision to change churches. Then, suddenly, my sister died in an automobile accident.

My wife and I realized how unsure the future is and that we mustn't delay in acting on what we knew was the truth. So, when the man teaching us the Bible invited us to church, we went. The people of the church were friendly and kind; we felt welcome.

Saturday had been my busiest day selling bread. I didn't think we could survive unless I worked on Saturday. But when I tried to sell bread on Saturday, God didn't bless my business. I realized that I was losing God's blessing by not obeying Him in this matter. I stopped selling bread and found work that wouldn't require me to work on Sabbath.

I realized that smoking and drinking were wrong, and I stopped buying cigarettes and alcohol. The money we save more than pays for our tithes and offerings.

I'm convinced that we're where God wants us to be. I invite others to church, and we have started a small group that meets in our house.

Our church is growing, and I pray that one day soon we'll have a church building in which to worship and invite our friends. I want to bring my large family—my ten brothers and sisters, their children, and many other relatives—to God. I want them to know that His truth is for today, for us.

Your mission offerings helped support the work in our country, so a blind man could show us the light of God's love. And a recent Thirteenth Sabbath Offering is helping to build a church in our city so others can come to Christ, as well. Thank you!

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FAUSTINO MENDEZ shares his faith in Veracruz, Mexico.

# The Coat of Different Colors



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** Gen. 29:21–30:24; 34; 37; 42:13; 1 Cor. 9:24–26.

**Memory Text:** “Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age: and he made him a coat of many colours” (*Genesis 37:3*).

The seed (so to speak) for this whole story began in Genesis 29, with Jacob and his wives and concubines. One father, four mothers, and about a dozen children between them: one didn't need to be a prophet to know beforehand what a dysfunctional and dismal family this would turn out to be.

How much better had Jacob followed the earliest archetype example, the one from Eden: one husband, one wife. Period. This was the ideal model for all homes, for all times.

But as we have seen, God created us free beings, and that freedom includes the freedom to do wrong. Symbolic, perhaps, of the mistakes that Jacob made, the famous “coat of many colors” reveals how one mistake can lead to others and others, with consequences far beyond our control.

How much better, then, to nip sin in the bud before it devours us and those we love.

\**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 23.*

## The Genesis of a Family Disaster

Life, as we all know, doesn't come sealed off, in distinct and separate categories or sections. Everything impacts just about everything. In fact, Einstein's theory of general relativity teaches that all matter in the universe has a gravitational pull on all other matter. That is, your body exerts a gravitational pull not only on your neighbor but on the sun and everything else in the created world, as well.

Of course, we don't need a lesson in physics to recognize the reality of how the deeds and actions of one person can radically, and even tragically, impact others, even generations later. Who we are, where we are, why we are what we are—these all have been affected to some degree by the actions of others completely out of our control. Thus, we need to be careful regarding the things we say and do; for who knows the impact, short-term and long-term, and either for good or for ill, that our deeds and words will have on others?

**Read** Genesis 24 and 29:21–30. What kind of family is being created here? What lesson should this reveal to us about how following customs of the world, especially when they go against principles of truth, can lead to disaster?

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"The sin of Jacob, and the train of events to which it led, had not failed to exert an influence for evil—an influence that revealed its bitter fruit in the character and life of his sons. As these sons arrived at manhood they developed serious faults. The results of polygamy were manifest in the household. This terrible evil tends to dry up the very springs of love, and its influence weakens the most sacred ties. The jealousy of the several mothers had embittered the family relation, the children had grown up contentious and impatient of control, and the father's life was darkened with anxiety and grief."—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 208, 209.

**What things have you been handed that were beyond your control? A lot, isn't there? Right now, think about some important decisions you are going to make. Ask yourself, How might these choices impact others, and is that what I really want to see happen?**

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## Joseph and His Brothers

Sibling rivalry, even in the most traditional of homes, can be bad enough. But in this mix, it turned into a festering brew, for in it were ingredients such as hatred and jealousy and favoritism and pride that led eventually to disaster.

For starters, the brothers of Joseph weren't exactly the sweetest lot of young lads, were they?

**Read** Genesis 34. What does this chapter tell us about the brothers' characters?

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Then, too, there was the issue of Joseph's dreams (*Gen. 37:5–11*), in which the whole family bows in obeisance toward him. If the brothers didn't like him beforehand, these dreams would only increase their dislike. In fact, that's exactly what Genesis 37:8 says.

But there's more.

**Read** Genesis 37:2. How would this only make relations worse between Joseph and his brothers?

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No one likes to be tattled on, and regardless of how bad the brothers' conduct was, they surely didn't appreciate Joseph telling on them to their father. Though the text doesn't say specifically what they were doing, considering their past conduct, it most likely was something that needed to be dealt with before they brought even more shame and reproach on themselves and their family.

Finally, too, perhaps the biggest issue was that, as the Bible comes out and says, "Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children" (*Gen. 37:3*). The brothers weren't stupid; they had surely picked up on their father's attitude, and that could have made a bad situation worse.

Hence, however inexcusable the brothers' actions were toward Joseph, this background helps us better understand what led to them.

**We all, to some degree, are trapped in our circumstances. Things happen that are beyond our control. The questions for us always must be, then, How do I respond to these circumstances? Do they dominate me to the point that I compromise my principles, or do I allow my principles to guide me through my circumstances?**

## The Coat of Many Colors

The bad characters of the brothers stood out even more in contrast to the character of Joseph.

"There was one, however, of a widely different character—the elder son of Rachel, Joseph, whose rare personal beauty seemed but to reflect an inward beauty of mind and heart. Pure, active, and joyous, the lad gave evidence also of moral earnestness and firmness. He listened to his father's instructions, and loved to obey God. The qualities that afterward distinguished him in Egypt—gentleness, fidelity, and truthfulness—were already manifest in his daily life. His mother being dead, his affections clung the more closely to the father, and Jacob's heart was bound up in this child of his old age. He 'loved Joseph more than all his children.' "—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 209.

**Read** Genesis 37:3, 4. How did this act by their father make the situation worse?

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The costly coat, given to Joseph by a doting father and beautifully woven in a variety of colors, certainly was finer than any of his brothers' cloaks and was a kind of garment usually worn by people of distinction. The brothers no doubt assumed that their father would bestow further honors upon this child, and that could mean that he would get the birthright. They could have easily read into it that Joseph would get the greater inheritance. Whatever the father meant by giving Joseph the coat—and it could simply have been a token of love and nothing more—it was a big mistake, for it fanned even more the flames of hatred in the brothers' hearts toward Joseph.

In a sense, the coat symbolizes earthly honors and earthly distinction—earthly and, therefore, temporal and superficial in the end. In writing the story, however, Moses placed the coat in the context of Jacob loving Joseph more than the other children, and thus, it was also central in the context of their hatred for him and what that hatred led to.

**Have you ever been given a worldly honor? How good did you feel at the time? How long before the euphoria or the sense of satisfaction or whatever good feeling you had wore off, and the honor came to mean little or nothing? What lesson should you take from that? See 1 Cor. 9:24–26.**

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## The Coat Stripped

**Read** Genesis 37:12–25. What great contrast between good and evil is seen here, between innocence and treachery?

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Not only did Joseph's brothers plot his death, they also planned in advance just what they would tell their father. *Oh, Father. We're so sorry. We found this coat. Is it Joseph's? If so, then a ferocious animal must have devoured him.* It's hard to imagine how people could be so full of hatred toward their own brother that they could do something like this.

**Read** Genesis 37:23. What is significant about what happened there?

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The first thing the brothers talked about when they saw Joseph from afar was the dreams, which made their hatred for him grow. Now, once and for all, they would see what would come of those dreams. It's interesting to note that the first recorded act against Joseph by his brothers was the stripping away of his coat. The Hebrew makes it clear that they were talking about the much-hated coat, the one that their father had made for him. The text stresses that it was "on him." Along with everything else, to see him approach wearing the coat must have only added to their anger.

Thus, here we can see the brothers attempting to undo all the things that caused them so much hatred and anger. The coat for them symbolized all that they hated about their brother, all the good things about him and the bad things about themselves. It must have been with a lot of joy, glee, and satisfaction that they stripped off the coat. Now, suddenly, without that fancy garment, which symbolized what they feared was Joseph's superiority over them, Joseph was helpless before those who, according to his own dreams, were one day to bow down before him.

**Look at how irrational the brothers' actions were as a result of their emotions. How often do we allow our emotions to drive us to do irrational things? How can we learn to keep our emotions under the power of God and thus spare ourselves (and often others) from the terrible consequences of things done in fits of deep emotion?**

## “Thy Son’s Coat”

“So they took Joseph’s tunic, and slaughtered a male goat and dipped the tunic in the blood; and they sent the varicolored tunic and brought it to their father and said, ‘We found this; please examine it to see whether it is your son’s tunic or not’ ” (*Gen. 37:31, 32, NASB*).

How could they, the sons of a loving father, stoop so low as to hand their father the cloak he had given his son, now splashed with blood, and ask him to identify it? Maybe even a day before they had committed this crime, nothing like it had entered their minds. But once we start on a trail of sin, who knows where it will lead?

**Read** Genesis 37:26–36. What is revealing about the language the brothers used before their father?

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Notice, the brothers’ question referred not to “our brother’s coat” but to “your son’s coat.” The coldness, the callousness, is amazing. Perhaps, too, it was a kind of unconscious defense mechanism for them. It wasn’t “our brother’s” coat that they found but, rather, “thy son’s coat”—a way to limit in their own minds the evil that they had done.

Thus, the coat had a role both in the beginning and in the end. A symbol of the relationship between Jacob and Joseph, it now was covered in blood, a symbol of Joseph’s “demise” and what they all assumed would be the end of Joseph and all their animosity toward him. No doubt, though, this act solved one problem only to bring on a host of others. Surely the brothers must have been pained by their father’s grief. Surely, day by day seeing Jacob mourn, these men must have struggled with guilt and remorse.

**Read** Genesis 42:13, 21–23, 32 and Genesis 44:28. What do these verses tell us about the long-lasting impact of the brothers’ deeds on themselves and their family?

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In the end, the Lord brought good out of the evil that the brothers had done, but that hardly justifies what they did. However extreme their actions were, this story should remind us of how quickly sins can get out of hand, blind us, and lead us to do things that more often than not lead to tragedy and suffering.

**Further Study:** Read Ellen G. White, “The Return to Canaan,” “Joseph in Egypt,” and “Joseph and His Brothers,” pp. 209–240, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*; pp. 428–432, in *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1.

“Joseph, unsuspecting of what was to befall him, approached his brethren with gladness of heart to greet them after his long, wearisome journey. His brothers rudely repulsed him. He told them his errand, but they answered him not. Joseph was alarmed at their angry looks. . . . They accused him of hypocrisy. As they gave utterance to their envious feelings, Satan controlled their minds, and they had no sense of pity, and no feelings of love for their brother. They stripped him of his coat of many colors that he wore, which was a token of his father’s love, and which had excited their envious feelings.”—Ellen G. White, *The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 1, pp. 128, 129.

### Discussion Questions:

- ①** What other kinds of “coats of many colors” are there? What are things of the world that we covet, which sooner or later can be easily stripped from us and defiled in blood? What kind of worldly honors seem to mean so much and yet, in the end, really mean nothing at all?
- ②** Think about the context of this week’s lesson and then read Genesis 45:22. What irony is found there?
- ③** Joseph often has been seen as a type of Christ. Go through the Joseph story and see what parallels you can find between Christ and Joseph. Share your answers with your class.
- ④** There’s little doubt the brothers felt great remorse for their actions. We don’t know what their father did with the bloodied coat. Perhaps he kept it as a memento of his beloved son. Imagine how the brothers would have felt each time they saw this coat, once a symbol of their jealousy, and now a symbol of their guilt. How can we learn to think before we act and not to do things rashly? How much different this story would have been had the brothers known the Lord whom their father served! If the brothers knew how to pray, how to die to self, how to surrender to the Lord in faith and obedience, none of this would have happened, and so much pain and suffering could have been spared. How can we learn not to fall into the same trap that these men did?

# A Passionate Giver

Deok Ja (*Dohk jah*) watched the Christians enter the church across the street from her home in southwestern Korea. The children were so well behaved; she wished her daughters had such friends to play with.

One day a woman knocked on her door and introduced herself as the wife of the pastor of the church across the street. She offered Deok Ja a magazine, *Signs of the Times*®. The pastor's wife visited often after that, bringing gifts of vegetables and bread. She invited Deok Ja to attend a meeting on health, and Deok Ja went, because she wanted to know more about healthful living. She attended worship services, and in time, she found Jesus as her Savior and joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

God's love bubbled over in her life, and Deok Ja shared that love with others. But her husband and children held the first place in her prayers.

Her husband allowed her to worship and to teach their children about God, but he wasn't interested in religion. Deok Ja prayed that God would work a miracle in her husband's heart and bathed her prayers with kind words and deeds.

For ten years she prayed and shared God's love with others, leading many to Christ. She taught their daughters to do the same. Still her heart ached for her husband, who told her that he would consider attending church with her after he retired from public service. Then on New Year's Day one year the family shared their wishes for the coming year. One daughter expressed her wish that the family could be united in Christ. When Deok Ja's husband heard that, he responded, "I'll try."

He kept his promise and began attending church with the family. One Sabbath he stood in church and said, "I'm here because I've seen God through my wife, who has prayed for me faithfully for many years." In time he surrendered his life to Christ and was baptized. Today Deok Ja's husband invites his colleagues to special meetings in the church.

Deok Ja continues to bring people to Christ through every means possible. Her daughter has caught her mother's spirit of evangelism and plans to serve a year in the church's 1000 Missionary Movement program in the Philippines.

"Evangelism is giving," Deok Ja says. "And our church has many great programs that help us to share God's love with others. Our mission offerings help make this outreach possible, and when someone gives their life to Christ, I invite them to share the blessings they've received with others. In this way many will come to know my beautiful Savior."

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DEOK JA lives in southwestern Korea.

# The Priestly Garments of Grace



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** Exod. 32:1–6; Lev. 21:7–22:8; Exodus 28; Rev. 21:12–14; Heb. 4:14, 15.

**Memory Text:** “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light” (1 Peter 2:9).

One great theme from the Protestant Reformation is what has been called “the priesthood of all believers,” the idea—derived especially (but not solely) from the above text—that all Christians function as priests before God and that, because they have Jesus, they don’t need earthly mediators (as in some religious systems) between them and the Lord. “For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 2:5).

After the life, death, resurrection, and high priestly ministry of Jesus, the old Hebrew system that God had initiated was fulfilled in Christ. The Levitical priesthood has been replaced and a new order established, one in which we all are part of the “royal priesthood.”

This week, as we study the garments worn by the priests in the old system, we can learn a bit about what it means to be priests in the new.

\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 30.

## Old Covenant Grace

Jesus said it about as clearly as human language could express it: “‘From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked’” (*Luke 12:48, NIV*). It’s a powerful principle, one that we as Adventists, with all that we have been given (and we have been given *so much!*), would do well to take seriously. Just compare the truths we have been given with some of the other doctrines out there (eternal torment in hell, Sabbath changed to Sunday, 144,000 Jewish virgins preaching the gospel when the church is secretly raptured during the reign of the antichrist) in order to understand all that we have been entrusted with.

Hence, it is this principle that makes the sin of Aaron and the golden calf that much worse.

**Read Exodus 32:1–6. What possible excuse could Aaron have had for partaking in this flagrant apostasy?**

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The apostasy itself was bad enough, but that Aaron acquiesced in it seems even more incredible. Think about all that Aaron had been privileged with. Aaron was right there with Moses from the start (*Exod. 4:27–30*); Aaron was Moses’ spokesman before Pharaoh (*Exod. 7:1*); Aaron cast down the rod that became a serpent (*vs. 10*); Aaron smote the waters that turned to blood (*vs. 20*); and Aaron was part of a select few who were able to approach the Lord in a very special way (*Exod. 24:9, 10*). In short, the man had been given privileges that few in history ever had, and yet, when a great test came, he failed miserably.

However, and here’s the amazing thing, God not only forgave Aaron his sin, the Lord eventually allowed Aaron to wear the sacred garments as the covenant nation’s first high priest, a type for the high priestly ministry of Jesus Himself (*Heb. 8:1*). In other words, though Aaron was guilty of a terrible sin himself, he was also the recipient of God’s redeeming grace; grace so great that it not only forgave him but allowed Aaron to assume a sacred office that, at its core, is all about God’s grace and mercy and forgiveness. Thus, Aaron’s life is a special example of mercy and redemption available to all in Christ.

**Have you ever failed, even miserably, to live up to what you have been given? How can you get hope from Aaron’s example for yourself that all is not lost, even despite your mistakes?**

## The Priesthood

**“And take thou unto thee Aaron thy brother, and his sons with him, from among the children of Israel, that he may minister unto me in the priest’s office, even Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar, Aaron’s sons” (Exod. 28:1).**

The Levitical priesthood was established during the wilderness wanderings of the children of Israel (*see Gen. 14:18*) and was to last more than fifteen hundred years. Although the concept of a priesthood to the Lord had already long existed, the establishment of the Levitical priesthood provided a clearer view of its role.

As we saw yesterday, despite the enormity of his sin, Aaron was chosen by the Lord to become the first head of this new priesthood. This shows that the priests needed to be able to relate to the people whom they represented before God, because that was exactly what they were doing: acting as representatives, mediators between fallen humanity and a holy God. Aaron, as a fallen human being, easily could relate to the fallen human beings whom he was to represent. Who would he be to judge others in their sin when he was hardly innocent himself?

At the same time, the priesthood was a sacred honor, and the priests were to represent holiness and purity. After all, they were the ones who were standing before the Lord in place of the people. They had to be “holy”; otherwise, what was the point of a priesthood? They had to be different, not in an arbitrary way (different just to be different) but different in a sacred sense, a sense that would—while acknowledging their closeness to those whom they were representing—clearly differentiate them from the masses as a whole.

**What** were some of the things required of the priests, and what do you think these things were to represent? *Lev. 21:7–22:8.*

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However difficult some of these concepts are for us today to grasp, the idea nevertheless should be clear: the priesthood was to be something different, sacred, and special. Priests were symbols of Jesus, and their work was to symbolize, in shadows and types, what Jesus would do in our behalf.

**Should we be different from the world around us? If so, why, and in what ways?**

## Priestly Garments

“And these are the garments which they shall make; a breastplate, and an ephod, and a robe, and a broidered coat, a mitre, and a girdle: and they shall make holy garments for Aaron thy brother, and his sons, that he may minister unto me in the priest’s office” (*Exod. 28:4*).

As one studies the earthly sanctuary model, it should be clear that nothing was left to chance. God gave the priests explicit instructions on what was to be done. This also is apparent when it came to the garments that the priests were to wear. Everything was done according to exact instructions.

**Read** Exodus 28, the description of the clothing that was to be made for Aaron, the high priest, and for the priests in general. Without getting caught up in intricate details, what spiritual lessons can we take in general from what is being presented here?

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“The pattern of the priestly robes was made known to Moses in the mount. Every article the high priest was to wear, and the way it should be made, were specified. These garments were consecrated to a most solemn purpose. By them was represented the character of the great antitype, Jesus Christ. They covered the priest with glory and beauty, and made the dignity of his office to appear. When clothed with them, the priest presented himself as a representative of Israel, showing by his garments the glory that Israel should reveal to the world as the chosen people of God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Youth’s Instructor*, June 7, 1900.

A great deal has been written over the centuries about the supposed meaning and symbolism of each color and fabric and stone and chain and the like. Whatever their individual meanings, together they represented the perfection and holiness and beauty and dignity of “the great Antitype,” Jesus our true High Priest who ministers in the sanctuary in heaven (*Heb. 8:1, 2*).

Notice, too, in the texts the idea of the priests *bearing* various things (*Exod. 28:12, 29, 30, 38, 42*). This, of course, is a crucial theme in the whole plan of salvation, which the priesthood and sanctuary symbolized—the idea of Jesus, our Substitute, bearing in Himself our sins and taking upon Himself the punishment for them. All of this was foreshadowed through the sanctuary service and the clothing of the priests, filled with symbolism that represented the character and work of Jesus in our behalf.

## Breastplate of Judgment

Of all the vestments worn by the priests, the breastplate of judgment (*Exod. 28:15*) to be worn by the high priest was the most elaborate and intricate. The other garments were more like a backdrop to this sacred part of the priestly vestment. Considerable time, about one-third of the chapter (*Exod. 28:15–30*), is spent describing the construction of this sacred ornament. That alone should indicate something of just how central and important it was to the ministry of the priests in the sanctuary.

**Read** Exodus 28:15–30. What is the meaning of the different stones? What does it mean that the priest would “bear the names of the sons of Israel over his heart”? Vs. 29, NIV; see also Rev. 21:12–14.

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Here, in a unique way, we see again the theme of the priest, a symbol of Jesus, bearing His people. The Hebrew word there for “bear” is a common word in the Old Testament for the bearing of sin, something that the priests would do as part of their ministry (*Lev. 10:17; Exod. 28:38; Num. 18:1, 22*). Now, though, it’s used in the context of the priest bearing the names of Israel; though the immediate context is somewhat different, the idea is still there: God’s people must be completely dependent upon the Lord, who forgives them, who sustains them, and who offers them the power to live the holy lives that He demands from His people (*Phil. 4:13*).

Notice, too, where the priest bears the names of the people. Upon his heart. The text specifically mentions that location, a common symbol in the Bible (and in many cultures) that reveals the love and tender care that the Lord has for His children.

Another important point is that each tribe had a different gem, each with different qualities, to symbolize the distinctiveness of each tribe (see *Genesis 49*). Commentators have seen this as a way to point out the distinctive differences and traits, not just in the twelve tribes, nor just in the Twelve Apostles (*Rev. 21:14*), but of the church as a whole, which is made of various “living stones” (*1 Pet. 2:5, NIV*). No matter how different we all are in personality, character, and gifts, we are still to be united in purpose under the grace and Lordship of our great High Priest, Jesus.

**What are ways that you have personally experienced the love of God? How has He shown you that He has you near His heart? Why is it important to dwell on those experiences, and how can you draw strength from them, especially in times of trial?**

## Jesus, Our High Priest

“Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin” (*Heb. 4:14, 15, NIV*). What hope and promise do you find in these two verses that you can apply to your own life and in your own struggle with temptation?

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Because Christ resides today as our Priest in the sanctuary in heaven, He, in a sense, wears the breastplate on His heart, as well. And because He “ever liveth to make intercession” (*Heb. 7:25*) for us, we should find comfort in the knowledge that our High Priest is touched with the feelings of our problems, pains, and temptations. Like Aaron, Jesus had been a human being who knew the trials, tribulations, and temptations of all humanity; unlike Aaron, however, Jesus was “without sin,” a crucial distinction, for out of His sinlessness we can claim two wonderful promises: (1) the robe of His righteousness can be ours by faith, and thus, we know that we stand perfect before God; and (2) we can have the power to overcome temptation just as Jesus did.

**Read** Hebrews 8:10–13. What promises are there for us, and how should these promises be made manifest in our lives?

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Here we can see both aspects of what it means to have salvation in Christ, to be covered in His righteousness. How wonderful is the promise that the Lord will be “merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more” (vs. 12). He is talking about those who through faith have surrendered to Jesus and have claimed His New-Covenant promises, those who have His law written in their hearts and thus obey it, not to achieve salvation but because they already have it. Clothed in the covering of His righteousness, they now live out that righteousness in their own lives. That’s the heart and soul of the New Covenant.

**Further Study:** Read Ellen G. White, “The Tabernacle and Its Services,” pp. 347, 348, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*; “The Lord’s Vineyard,” p. 288, in *Christ’s Object Lessons*; “Destroyed for Lack of Knowledge,” p. 293, in *Prophets and Kings*; “The Sanctuary,” pp. 250–253, in *Early Writings*; “What Is the Sanctuary?” p. 416, “God’s People Delivered,” p. 646, in *The Great Controversy*.

“Christ is the minister of the true tabernacle, the high priest of all who believe in Him as a personal Saviour, and His office no other can take. He is the high priest of the church.”—Ellen G. White, *That I May Know Him*, p. 74.

“We should daily exercise faith; and that faith should daily increase as it is exercised, as we realize that He has not only redeemed us, but has loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests unto God and the Father.”—Ellen G. White, *Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 287.

## Discussion Questions:

- ① Read Revelation 1:5, 6, where Jesus tells us about His job description and then gives us what we might call an “eagerly anticipated promise.” Discuss what is meant in verse 6 where He says that He has made us to be “kings and priests” to serve Him forever.
- ② Go over some of the other garments worn by the priests as revealed in Exodus 28. What spiritual lessons and truths can be found there, as well?
- ③ We have been warned about the danger of pretending to don the garments of righteousness but not really living a righteous life. Talk about ways to evaluate our own motives and actions. How can we know if we really are wearing His robe of righteousness or if we are just fooling ourselves? What are ways to know if we are covered or if we are really walking around in the shame of our nakedness?
- ④ Discuss the idea from Sunday’s lesson about the grace and forgiveness extended to Aaron. This man, who had been given a high responsibility, failed to live up to that responsibility, and, as a result, tragedy ensued. And yet, Aaron eventually was given an even greater responsibility. Is there anything we can take away from this story for ourselves, as a church, when someone given great responsibility also fails to live up to the responsibility? Discuss.

# The Power of Influence

Samara is nine years old and lives in northern Brazil. Since she was an infant, her parents have taught her to love and honor God. So, it was natural that when she saw the ice cream vendor come through her neighborhood with a cigarette in his mouth, she told him that smoking was bad for his health and made Jesus sad.

The man threw his cigarette down and asked to speak to Samara's mother.

"Your daughter is a wise little girl," he said. "She has taught me that smoking is bad, and I want you to know that I will never smoke again."

After that, whenever the man passed by Samara's house, he'd ask, "Where's my little teacher?" Samara called the man Tio, which means "uncle." Samara's father talked to Tio about Jesus, too, and invited him to church. Tio agreed, but he lived too far away to attend the family's church, so Father gave him directions to an Adventist church closer to his home. Tio went to that church, and in time, he gave his heart to Jesus.

Sometime later, on a Sabbath afternoon, Samara saw a teenage boy sitting on his front porch next door. It was her new neighbor, Eduardo. She started talking to him and asked him if he believed in God. Eduardo said that they used to attend church, but the family had stopped going.

Samara invited Eduardo to attend the Sunday evening program at her church. Eduardo went and took his little brother. Samara asked the brothers to study the Bible. The brothers agreed, so Samara and her father studied the Bible with them.

When Eduardo finished the Bible studies, he accepted Jesus as his Savior and asked to be baptized. Samara hadn't been baptized yet, so she asked if she could be baptized with Eduardo. Her parents and the pastor agreed, so the two friends were baptized together.

Eduardo's family has moved away, but he keeps in touch with Samara's family and has told them that he is sharing God's love with others and is giving Bible studies in his new hometown.

Samara enjoys sharing God's love with others and credits her parents with being good examples who helped her make sharing her faith a natural part of her life. Recently, when she preached for children's Sabbath, 15 people gave their hearts to Jesus.

Samara knows that age doesn't matter when it comes to telling others about Jesus; God can use anyone who is willing.

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SAMARA lives in northern Brazil.

# Elijah's and Elisha's Mantle



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** 1 Kings 19:1–19; 2 Sam. 10:3, 4; Ezek. 16:15, 16; 1 Kings 21:21–29; 2 Kings 2:1–18.

**Memory Verse:** “For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death” (2 Corinthians 7:10).

**F**ew biblical characters have had a more colorful existence than the prophet Elijah. What an incredible story of faith, of trial, and of God’s overwhelming power in this world.

Today, in Judaism at least, he still looms large. In fact, in Jewish tradition he has been glorified more than perhaps any other biblical figure.

Each Passover, for instance, a special cup of wine is filled and put on the Passover table. During the Passover itself, the door of the house is opened, and everyone stands in order to allow Elijah the prophet to enter and drink. At circumcisions, a chair, “the chair of Elijah,” is set aside as part of the ceremony. Also, as the Sabbath ends, Jews sing about Elijah, hoping he will come “speedily, in our days . . . along with the Messiah, son of David, to redeem us.”

An example of Elijah’s prominence in Jewish thinking is found in the Gospel of Matthew, when Peter says that some had thought Jesus Himself was Elijah (*Matt. 16:14*).

This week we’ll look at Elijah and the mantle he wore and see what spiritual lessons we can draw from him and it.

\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 7.

## “A Still Small Voice”

Elijah’s life, recorded in 1 and 2 Kings, includes instances where he bravely faced kings and their threats on his life. There was, however, one notable exception—the time when, scared by threats from a nasty queen, he ran for his life.

In 1 Kings 18, he called down fire from heaven onto Mount Carmel, had the prophets of Baal slaughtered, and warned Ahab of the approaching rain. The power of the Lord came upon him, and after he tucked his cloak into his belt, he ran ahead of Ahab for the 20 miles to Jezreel.

By the next chapter, however, this same man of God appears in a whole new light.

**Read** 1 Kings 19:1–4. What lessons can we take from this passage regarding how, no matter what our relationship with God has been, no matter what great triumphs of faith we have experienced, none of us are immune from deep spiritual lows?

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The Lord, though, wasn’t done with Elijah, not even after his rather desperate and somewhat pathetic prayer. He still gave Elijah powerful evidence of His love for him and His interest in Elijah’s life.

**Read** 1 Kings 19:5–19. What is the significance of Elijah’s wrapping his face in the mantle?

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It’s fascinating that though Elijah saw a great wind, an earthquake, and a fire, none of these caused him to wrap his face in his mantle. It was only the presence of the Lord in “a still small voice” that brought this response to him—a response of fear, respect, and self-protection.

What Elijah needed to learn was that, mighty and moving though these forces be, they do not of themselves portray a true picture of the Spirit of God. Elijah heard the voice of the Lord in a quiet and subtle way, telling him what to do, and it was this voice that he obeyed.

**How can we learn to recognize the voice of the Lord speaking to us? More important, however, is this question: do you obey what you hear, or do you squelch that “still small voice” speaking to your soul? What does your answer tell you about yourself?**

## The Change of Garments

After the magnificent demonstration of God's power at Mount Carmel, Elijah complained that he was the only one left who loved the Lord. The Lord, it seems, ignored Elijah's whining, but when he finished his speech, the Lord then gave him instructions: he was to anoint two kings and Elisha.

Following the Lord's directions to find a successor, Elijah went to the farm of Shaphat, Elisha's father, and found Elisha plowing with oxen. Maybe Elijah waved to Elisha to get his attention, and Elisha stopped his work and waited to hear Elijah's message.

**Read** 1 Kings 19:19. How was the call of Elisha demonstrated there in the field?

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We aren't given the exact words of Elijah or Elisha's response to the call of Elijah, but we do know that he responded positively. Elijah now cast his mantle, a symbol of his responsibilities as a servant of God, on Elisha's shoulders (*see Num. 20:28*). The symbolism is pretty obvious. Elisha was now given a sacred calling.

**In** other incidents of the Bible, a mantle (or cloak or some similar garment) was not always used as an indication of God's invitation to serve Him. How is the idea of a mantle used in these verses: Job 1:20; Psalm 109:29; Jude 22, 23; 2 Samuel 10:3, 4; Ezekiel 16:15, 16?

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Elijah's mantle here meant devotion, commitment, and dedication. "As Elijah, divinely directed in seeking a successor, passed the field in which Elisha was plowing, he cast upon the young man's shoulders the mantle of consecration. During the famine the family of Shaphat had become familiar with the work and mission of Elijah, and now the Spirit of God impressed Elisha's heart as to the meaning of the prophet's act. To him it was the signal that God had called him to be the successor of Elijah."—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 219, 220.

**Think about how a single object can have both good and bad connotations, depending on how it is used. What are you doing with the things in your own life? What kind of meanings are you, by your actions, giving them? What have they come to symbolize to you, and why?**

## The Wearing of Sackcloth

In the Elijah narratives, clothing comes into play with other characters, as well.

Ahab, the king of Israel, wished to purchase a vineyard that was next to the palace. It belonged to Naboth, a Jezreelite. When Naboth refused to sell it and Jezebel heard about it, she became incensed and cleverly laid a plot for Naboth's demise. After Naboth's death, Ahab took possession of the vineyard, not realizing that Elijah had been instructed to meet him there.

" 'You shall speak to him, saying, "Thus says the Lord: 'Have you murdered and also taken possession?' " ' And you shall speak to him saying, "Thus says the Lord: 'In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth, dogs shall lick your blood, even yours' " ' (1 Kings 21:19, NKJV).

Elijah's mission to face Ahab on several serious issues should have produced a fair amount of stress, but he seemed strong and willing, at least here, to follow the instructions from his Lord even though he knew his life could be in danger. Now he must tell Ahab what denunciations the Lord has pronounced on him besides the one about the dogs licking his blood.

**Read** 1 Kings 21:21–29. How are we to understand Ahab's response, especially in light of what those verses say about the kind of man he was?

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When Ahab heard these words, he presented himself to the Lord in an exceedingly humble way (1 Kings 21:27), which included him tearing his clothes, putting on sackcloth, and even refusing to eat. The rest of the chapter implies that his repentance and humility must have been genuine. The tearing of his robe, a common action in that time to represent horror and sorrow, revealed that he truly accepted the truth of what Elijah said to him. How deep, how long lasting that repentance went, the text doesn't say; what it does say is that the rending of his robe revealed the sincerity of his heart at that time.

**"Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death" (2 Cor. 7:10, NIV). Read the immediate context of that verse. What is Paul saying here, and how can we apply this warning to our own lives?**

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## The Taking of Elijah

Whatever one can say about Elijah, he certainly had an interesting and dramatic time of it (though, no doubt, he's having more fun now). Second Kings 1 tells a fascinating story which leads into an even more fascinating one in the next chapter. If it could be said that anyone, to use the cliché, went out in a blaze of glory, it was Elijah.

**Read** 2 Kings 2:1–18 and answer the following questions:

1. What reasons might Elisha have had for refusing to separate from Elijah, despite the master's three requests that he do just that?
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2. Why did Elisha tear his clothes here? Was it for mourning or something else? If so, what?
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No doubt Elisha's response was one of extreme excitement and gratefulness. Yes, he *did* see the chariot and the horses. Yes, he *would have* a double portion of Elijah's power. Although, generally, the tearing of clothes meant mourning, this time Elisha may have been so overwhelmed that he tore his clothes in gratitude. He had in his hands Elijah's cloak. His tearing of his clothes also could have been symbolic of his getting rid of his own and putting on Elijah's.

When Elijah first put his mantle on farmer Elisha, both men knew that this act symbolized a calling to work for God (though Elisha must have given it back to Elijah at some point). Elisha now had this special garment in his own possession, signifying that he must carry on the responsibilities of leadership as Elijah had done.

Look, too, at Elisha's request of his mentor. (What request does this remind you of?) Elisha's words reveal something of his character, showing that he was a worthy successor to wear the mantle of the great prophet who was about "to be taken" from this world.

**What broader picture of existence does this story present to us? That is, how often do we tend to hold a narrow, materialistic view of the world, forgetting the ever-present reality of the supernatural realm, which also exists in this world and which interacts with us?**

## The Cloak

“He took up also the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and went back, and stood by the bank of Jordan; and he took the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and smote the waters, and said, Where is the Lord God of Elijah? and when he also had smitten the waters, they parted hither and thither: and Elisha went over” (*2 Kings 2:13, 14*). What story does this make us think of? What important symbolism is seen there?

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**Read** *2 Kings 2:15–18*. Try to put yourself in the place of these prophets from Jericho. Why might they have reacted as they did, trying to find Elijah, even though they knew that he had been taken?

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It is obvious from earlier texts that the prophets knew Elijah was going to be taken. The text doesn’t say if they themselves saw the event. In one sense, it doesn’t really matter, because they knew that the “Spirit of the Lord” had taken him. To where, though, was another matter. For some reason they believed that Elijah still could be found “on some mountain or in some valley” (*vs. 16, NIV*). Perhaps not prepared for the idea of someone being whisked off to heaven like that, they assumed the Lord did something else with him. And though they had the words of Elisha not to bother trying to find him, they insisted on it anyway. Perhaps, only then, after not finding him, did they realize what happened. Yet, even then there was room for doubt. Maybe the Lord set him down on some mountain or valley they hadn’t checked?

In the end, no matter the experiences or miracles we have seen, we still need to exercise faith, or else, sooner or later, doubt will creep in and seriously challenge our Christian experience.

**Think about some powerful experience you had with the Lord. No question, at the time and right after, your faith was strong. Over time, however, what happened, especially as the experience itself started receding in the stream of time? Thus, why is it important that you, on a daily basis, do things that can help keep your faith strong?**

**Further Study:** Read Ellen G. White, “Seth and Enoch,” p. 88, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*; “From Jezreel to Horeb,” “What Doest Thou Here?” and “In the Spirit and Power of Elias,” pp. 155–189, in *Prophets and Kings*.

“Elijah, who had been translated to heaven without seeing death, represented those who will be living upon the earth at Christ’s second coming, and who will be ‘changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump;’ when ‘this mortal must put on immortality;’ and ‘this corruptible must put on incorruption.’ 1 Cor. 15:51–53. Jesus was clothed with the light of heaven, as He will appear when He shall come ‘the second time without sin unto salvation.’ For He will come ‘in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.’ Heb. 9:28; Mark 8:38.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 422.

## Discussion Questions:

- ❶ What are practical things we can do to help us hear “the still small voice”? What things do we do that make that difficult, if not impossible? How does willful sin, in a big way, make us “hard of hearing,” so to speak?
- ❷ When you experience despair and discouragement that are almost more than you can bear, how do you know, as Elijah did, that the Lord is near and watching over you?
- ❸ The mantle of Elijah symbolized the succession of his ministry to Elisha, which brings up the question of succession in the church today. How does the process work, and how can we be sure that the right people are, to use an Elisha cliché, “handed the mantle”? Or can we?
- ❹ “Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death” (2 Cor. 7:10, NIV). In class, talk about what this text means and what we must learn from it ourselves about what true repentance is as opposed to a repentance that, itself, needs to be repented of?
- ❺ In this quarter’s lesson on clothing and garments, we are dealing with a lot of symbols. What are symbols, how are they interpreted, what meanings do we give to symbols, and what do those meanings tell us about ourselves?

# Curses and Blessings

João grew up in Angola in southwestern Africa. His family attended a Christian church, but their beliefs were mixed with spirit worship. When his mother became seriously ill, family members were sure her husband had cursed her. She fled with her four children to Namibia.

Life was hard, and João's mother sent her children to live with other people. João had to quit school and herd cattle. João was unhappy and ran away; he found his way back to Angola and lived with two of his aunts. But his aunts made and sold homemade beer, and soon young João was drinking beer too.

A friend gave him a little New Testament, and João began reading it. He stopped drinking and returned to his family's church. But something was missing.

One day he heard a radio program sponsored by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The teachings caught his attention. He had never heard of the Sabbath before and asked the priest at his family's church about Sabbath. When the priest didn't answer his questions, João stopped attending church. He compared what he heard on the radio programs with his New Testament and realized that the Adventists taught the truth. But he hesitated to visit an Adventist church, for his family said Adventists were witches. He visited several other churches, but none of them satisfied his thirst for truth.

One day João noticed a new church near the edge of town. He saw a sign announcing evangelistic meetings, so he decided to attend. João was impressed with the messages he heard, and, at the end of the series, he surrendered his life to God.

But his relatives were unhappy about his decision, for they still believed that Adventists were witches. João continued attending the Adventist church in spite of their accusations. He wanted to prove that Adventists were not witches. In time he was baptized, fully aware that life at home would be difficult.

Schools in Angola hold classes on Saturday, but God impressed him to honor the Sabbath day instead of study. His mother urged João to stop attending the Adventist church, because it went against the family's traditional beliefs. But João told her that Adventist beliefs were in line with the Bible, which was God's firm word.

Eventually, his mother allowed João to attend worship services in peace. Today he enjoys an active ministry that includes translating material for the radio program that led him to the church in the first place.

Our mission offerings support outreach efforts such as evangelistic meetings and radio and television broadcasts in Angola and around the world.

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JOÃO QUINTAS DA SILVA shares his faith in Lubango, Angola.

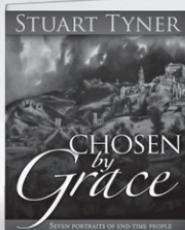
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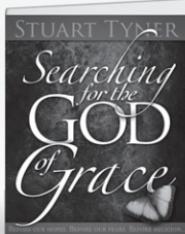
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Moses and Hayk are best friends. They live in Armenia. Moses has grown up in the Adventist faith. When his family moved to a small village, Moses met Hayk. The boys quickly became best friends. Moses realized that Hayk didn't attend church, so he invited his new friend. Hayk loved Sabbath School and began inviting his friends to come too. Soon the Sabbath School class was filled with children eager to learn about God.

The children in Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia don't have lesson quarterlies they can study during the week. Part of this quarter's Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help provide children's Sabbath School lesson guides in the languages of these three countries so that more children can learn that God loves them.

I'm glad that my church cares for its children. I'm glad I can help. For me it's personal.

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# In the Shadow of His Wings



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** Exod. 19:4, 2 Samuel 11, 12, Pss. 17:8, 32:1, 36:7, 51:2, 57:1, 61:4, 63:7.

**Memory Text:** “Because You have been my help, therefore in the shadow of Your wings I will rejoice” (Psalm 63:7, NKJV).

“There are three things which are too wonderful for me, yes, four which I do not understand: the way of an eagle in the air” (Prov. 30:18, 19, NKJV).

The eagle is a live jet fighter. Armed with a hooked beak and razor’s-edge talons, it is loaded like a jet fighter too. The eagle is wind and wing, bone, sinew, and blood. The eagle is scavenger, fisher, and thief. The eagle hurls itself from clouds toward water with the speed of a cyclonic storm. The eagle hobbles on balled-up claws in its nest to keep from dicing up its young. The eagle is majesty, power, and grace. The eagle is all these metaphors, yet greater than their sum. Small wonder, then, that the Bible writer failed to understand the fierce beauty of the eagle’s flight.

David himself turned to a similar image in his psalms about being sheltered under the wings of God. This week we will meditate with David through his psalms on how God shelters us and covers our sin. But first we will look at the events that inspired his need for these coverings. Then we will seek to understand why we, too, need to be sheltered under those same wings.

\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 14.

## The Naked Truth

Eagles can soar to an altitude of 10,000 feet, higher than most birds. Like the eagle, David soared high. The shepherd-king reached heights of greatness few monarchs ever attain. He was clothed in the spoils of military victory and covered with honor and glory. But David forgot that his kingly robes were a gift from God. They could not hide a man's sins—even a king's—from God's sight.

David's garments, in a spiritual sense, were priestly as well as kingly; he was the head of Israel's theocracy too. The bitter sins that stained these garments inspired Psalms 32 and 51. To appreciate fully the imagery in these psalms as a covering for sin and the imagery in other psalms of God's wings as a divine covering, we need to look at how the narrative events of David's life inspired them. How ironic and tragic that in a study devoted to the spiritual lessons of garments, the sad story of David's fall begins in a literal lack of them.

At the pinnacle of greatness, David faces his fiercest battle. The war isn't waged on the bloody fields of Rabbah but over the six inches of mental turf that lies behind David's frontal lobe. Satan chooses his "weapon" well. What Goliath with his monstrous lance failed to do to David, a bathing woman, seen from the king's rooftop, does. Obviously, David forgets the lesson of his sling: how easily a "giant" is felled by one small stone or, in this case, one small glance.

**One** small stone and down falls a giant. One small glance and down falls a king. David did many things to "cover" his sin of adultery and avoid exposure. What were they? *2 Samuel 11*. Why do our attempts to cover sin to avoid detection or punishment lead only to committing greater sins and to the threat of still greater exposure? How do the narrative details of David's story enforce this point?

One forbidden glance sets in motion events that end in murder and near civil war. David's story is of concealment after concealment to avoid consequences. The awful reality of sin is that committing one sin, without confessing and forsaking it, leads to committing another more heinous sin in order to hide the previous offense. David committed adultery and murder under the cloak of kingly power. But God's eye sees beneath the outer garments and lays bare the heart.

**It has been said, "If adversity has slain its thousands, prosperity has slain its ten thousands." With David's life in mind, what dangers does prosperity expose the soul to? Why does adversity often draw us closer to God? How can we avoid prosperity's pitfalls?**

## Nathan Bares All

For a whole year, David hides his sin under a veil of deceit. It looks as though the king has gotten away with murder. Sin hardens David's heart to stone. But God sends Nathan to break it.

**Read** Nathan's parable in 2 Samuel 12:1–12 and its interpretation, keeping in mind that Jesus also resorted to parables. What are the advantages of using them? What was it about David's condition that made clothing the truth in a story a more effective, even necessary, way of reaching him?

Only a few verses long, Nathan's parable holds precious lessons for reaching the sin-hardened heart. First, Nathan does not come to David as an accuser; instead, he humbly and tactfully solicits David's help. David's heart may be hardened by sin, but his sense of justice is not completely deadened. Second, by clothing the truth in a parable, Nathan breaches David's defenses. Third, Nathan's method of presentation invites David to listen without feeling judged. The result? David condemns himself.

**Nathan's** verdict, “Thou art the man,” rips through the veil of self-deceit in which David shrouded himself. David's response, “‘I have sinned against the Lord’” is met with “‘the Lord also has put away your sin’” (vs. 13, NKJV). Why was the Lord able to put away, or cover, David's sin? See 1 John 1:9.

David's sin is covered, but the child conceived in sin must die. For David, this tragedy must have been more bitter than his own death. He removes his kingly robes and puts on the garments of humility and mourning. He openly prostrates himself before God in repentance, pleading for his child's life. How ironic that, a year earlier, under the cover of darkness, David secretly prostrated himself in lust with Bathsheba on that fatal eve his dying child was conceived.

David reacts to the child's death in a manner that baffles his advisors. He rises. He bathes. He changes his clothes. He, the anointed of God, anoints himself anew and worships God. These actions demonstrate how those who have mourned for their sins must allow God to restore them: First, God raises the grieving sinner and bears him to Himself. Next, He washes away the guilt of our sin and clothes us in His righteousness. He anoints us with His Spirit so that we may worship Him.

David's fall into sin begins and ends with a bath. This final washing, however, is not a prelude to sin but a sign of a clean heart.

**What hope do David's bathing, garment change, and anointing give us? Why can we who have been washed clean by Jesus have full assurance that we may come worship Him?**

## Blessed Is He Whose Sin Is Covered . . .

**“Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered” (Ps. 32:1).**

For a whole year after his sin against Uriah and Bathsheba, David refuses to confess his sin, even to himself. But as Psalm 32 tells us, he suffers severe agony of mind and body as a result of his silence.

**Read** Psalm 32:3–5. In what ways does David use poetic imagery and symbolic language to describe what happens to him when he refuses to confess his sin? According to verse 5, what does David do to end his suffering?

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With lies and bloodshed David covers his sin of adultery, but the weight of his own guilt crushes him. As Psalm 32 shows, though, David casts himself in true humility and repentance on the sure mercy of God. In his cry for forgiveness, David does a number of things that are instructive for all who seek God’s covering of forgiveness: (1) David makes no excuse for his sin; (2) he makes no attempt to justify himself; (3) he does not find fault with God’s law for condemning him; (4) he blames only himself for his sin; and (5) he genuinely hates the sin that separated him from God and turns from it. And God covers it.

**David** conceals his sin (Ps. 32:3, 4); **God covers it** (vss. 1, 2). What is the difference between our concealing and God’s covering? Before the righteousness of Christ can cover sin, what must be done to it?

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God does not overlook sin. But sin is covered, meaning its guilt is no longer to be imputed, or brought against, the sinner when it is repented of. Confession alone is incomplete without repentance. We must not only be sorry for our sin, we must turn away from it in God’s power. God can forgive and cover all sin. His grace not only forgives sin but accepts the repentant sinner as though he or she never sinned! That is the power of Jesus, our Substitute, upon whom God lays the sin. In this way, Christ’s righteousness is imputed to the repentant sinner.

**How readily do you acknowledge before God your own sin and wrongdoing? If you do not, in the end, are you deceiving God or only yourself? Dwell on the implications of your answer.**

## Whiter Than Snow

Psalm 51, like Psalm 32, is a penitential psalm, written after David confesses his sin. Just as Psalm 32 alludes to garments in order to illuminate the concept of God's covering for sin, Psalm 51 also alludes to the imagery of garments as a sin covering. But here the emphasis is on the washing and whitening agents used to clean garments and on their spiritual significance. In other words, in this psalm, David metaphorically does his "dirty laundry."

**In Psalm 51:2, David asks God to wash him thoroughly. What does this washing involve? How do the images of "purge me with hyssop" and "whiter than snow" (vs. 7) help us understand the nature of this cleansing?**

The word that David uses here for washing is used elsewhere in Scripture to refer to the washing of a garment (*see Gen. 49:11, Exod. 19:10*). Purge suggests the idea of making atonement for sin. Hyssop, a gray-green marjoram plant, was used as a spice and had medicinal properties, thus it was both a nutritive and a healing agent. Hyssop, as David knew well, had a long history in Israel. It was used in the original Passover ritual (*Exod. 12:22*), in the day of cleansing a leper or a house (*Lev. 14:6, 49*), and in the offering of the red heifer for the purification of men and items unclean through contact with the dead. Moses used hyssop at the ratification of the covenant (*Heb. 9:19, 20*). See "Hyssop" in *The SDA Bible Dictionary*.

All these uses signify that hyssop was a powerful cleansing agent. David's use of hyssop shows he understood that only the remedy with the greatest purifying power could cleanse him from sin's defilement. And that remedy is the atoning blood of our Savior.

**In Psalm 51:10, David prays for God to create in him a clean heart. What does having a "clean heart" mean?**

God does not merely cleanse the heart from iniquity; He creates in His forgiven child a new heart. A new heart is a new mind. Paul exhorts us, "Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind" (*Rom. 12:2*) "through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ" (*Titus 3:5, 6, NKJV*). Prayer for forgiveness always should be united with prayer for heart renewal and holy living. David desires to be clothed in an entirely new mental and moral nature. He prays to be steadfast in obedience and not to be deprived of the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

## In the Sanctuary of His Wings

**“I will abide in Your tabernacle forever; I will trust in the shelter of Your wings” (Ps. 61:4, NKJV).**

Some eagles have wingspans of up to nine feet under which they can shelter and protect their hatchlings. God’s mercy, like the wings of the eagle, shelters those who forsake their sins, no matter how deep they may have fallen. But unlike the guilt of our sin, which is blotted out, the consequences or results of sin often may not be removed. David experienced the bitter reality of this truth, fourfold, in the deaths of three of his sons and in the rape of his daughter Tamar by her own half-brother, Amnon.

Sure, his sin had been forgiven, he could have peace in that sense. But in another sense, pain and suffering were to be his lot, all from a sin that had been forgiven.

May we all take heed!

**What did David seek in the shadow of God’s wings? What do they offer us covering from? Pss. 17:8, 36:7, 57:1.**

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David probably composed Psalm 61 while in exile during the time Absalom usurped the throne. It declares trust in the covering mercy of God, possibly referring to the mercy seat in God’s sanctuary. Here rests the ark of God’s covenant with His people, with its covering cherubim, whose overarching wings shelter the law—the written transcript of God’s character of love. David may have been expressing a desire to dwell, through faith, with God in His sanctuary, his soul garbed in the transforming light of that love.

**Perhaps, even now, though you’ve dedicated your life anew to God, you are suffering the consequences of sin: estrangement, exile, physical ailment, or emotional pain. What hope of healing does the shelter of God’s wings offer?**

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**Further Study:** Read Ellen G. White, “David’s Sin and Repentance,” pp. 717–726, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*; “Bible Biographies,” p. 157, in *Education*.

“David’s repentance was sincere and deep. There was no effort to palliate his crime. No desire to escape the judgments threatened, inspired his prayer. But he saw the enormity of his transgression against God; he saw the defilement of his soul; he loathed his sin. It was not for pardon only that he prayed, but for purity of heart. David did not in despair give over the struggle. In the promises of God to repentant sinners he saw the evidence of his pardon and acceptance. . . .

“Though David had fallen, the Lord lifted him up. He was now more fully in harmony with God and in sympathy with his fellow men than before he fell. . . .

“Whoever under the reproof of God will humble the soul with confession and repentance, as did David, may be sure that there is hope for him. Whoever will in faith accept God’s promises, will find pardon. The Lord will never cast away one truly repentant soul. He has given this promise: ‘Let him take hold of My strength, that he may make peace with Me; and he shall make peace with Me.’ Isaiah 27:5. ‘Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.’ Isaiah 55:7.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 725, 726, author’s emphasis.

### Discussion Questions:

- ❶ As a class, discuss the futility of coverings of our own devising compared with what Jesus willingly provides. What does He provide, and why is it the only covering for sin that can heal and save?
- ❷ Try writing one of your own psalms about God’s mercy and love. Like David, write it from your own personal experience. Bring it to class and share what you have written.
- ❸ Laundry detergent advertisements for bleaching agents promise to whiten and soften clothes. To bleach out a stain without softening it could be too harsh for fabric. To soften fabric without attending to the stain leaves it dirty. Why, then, do we need both the whitening power of God’s justice and the softening power of His mercy to cleanse the soul’s garment?
- ❹ Forgiven sin can make us miserable, but we mustn’t forget that it is *forgiven*. How can we learn that living with the consequences of our sin doesn’t mean that our sin hasn’t been forgiven?

## Circle of Love

Georgi Kertikov was an unbeliever living in Bulgaria when he was called to repair some electrical appliances in a woman's home. She invited him to church, and he accepted, mostly because he didn't want to lose her as a customer.

In Sabbath School the class was discussing the beasts from Revelation 13. Georgi was interested in Chinese mythology and fighting sports, and this chapter of the Bible, with its dragons and beasts, really appealed to him. He decided that any church that talked about fighting, blood, and dragons must be pretty good. So, he continued attending and was baptized two years later.

Georgi married and was called to serve as a Global Mission pioneer in a small town in Bulgaria. Three small Bible study groups had formed in the town. The Bulgarian group had five members, the Turkish group had some interests but no members, and a Romani (Gypsy) group had seven or eight interests and no members. Georgi worked with all three groups for the next 18 months, and a number of the Romani people were baptized.

Georgi was asked to move to Chirpan, a city in southern Bulgaria that has a sizable population of Romani. The group there had been without a leader for several months, and a number of members had drifted away.

Georgi began visiting the members and encouraging them to visit those who had fallen away. Although he isn't Romani, Georgi has learned that Romani are highly communal people with strong family and clan ties. So, visiting members—and teaching members how to visit—is a high priority.

He used his carpentry and electrical skills to help make friends in the community. He made a device to help a paralyzed man move his legs and repaired a hole that a horse had kicked in a woman's door. As he works, he shares his faith.

Georgi focuses on social events to build community between believers and their families and friends who may not yet come to the church. He plans picnics, work bees, sporting events, and even computer classes to draw people together, to cement friendships and introduce people to Jesus. Before he could teach young people how to use computers, they had to learn to type. He assigned them to create a songbook of Turkish religious songs that they sing in church.

Georgi loves his work. He loves to make friends and share his love for Jesus. Currently, he is preparing 30 people for baptism and making many more friends in the community to whom he can introduce Jesus.

Your mission offerings support the work of Global Mission in hard-to-reach places around the world.

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GEORGI KERTIKOV shares his faith in Chirpan, Bulgaria.

# Garments of Splendor



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Isaiah 1–5; 6:1–8; 51:6–8, 61; Luke 4:16–20.*

**Memory Text:** “I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels” (*Isaiah 61:10, NIV*).

**I**iving amid the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, Isaiah preached for more than four tumultuous decades, during which he produced some of the richest texts of the Bible. Written during a time of political, moral, military, and economic turmoil, Isaiah’s book is permeated, not just with warnings of gloom and doom upon the unrepentant but with themes of salvation, deliverance, and hope—the hope found in “the Lord, thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel,” the One who says, “I am the Lord thy God which teacheth thee to profit, which leadeth thee by the way that thou shouldest go” (*Isa. 48:17*).

Isaiah urged the people to put on the glorious garments of righteousness and to accept God’s salvation. Illustrations describing garments, coverings, and sackcloth help teach spiritual truths that have echoed through the ages. For Isaiah’s contemporaries and for us, the question is, again: do we claim the garments for ourselves, or do we continue in the shame of our own defilement and nakedness?

\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 21.

## Bring No More Futile Sacrifices

**“In that day the Lord will snatch away their finery: the bangles and headbands and crescent necklaces, the earrings and bracelets and veils, the headdresses and ankle chains and sashes, the perfume bottles and charms, the signet rings and nose rings, the fine robes and the capes and cloaks, the purses and mirrors, and the linen garments and tiaras and shawls” (*Isa. 3:18–23, NIV*).**

The opening chapters of Isaiah present a fairly bleak picture of the spiritual state of the southern kingdom. Over time, the descendants of those who witnessed the incredible miracles of the Exodus had fallen into complacency—and worse! No doubt most of them believed all those wonderful things happened, but the question they might have been asking themselves was, So what? What has any of that to do with us today? Why is what had happened to our ancestors long ago relevant to us today?

**Skim** through the first five chapters of Isaiah. What were some of the things that the people were doing, or the attitudes they had, that caused such a harsh warning to come upon them? What parallels can you find to our church today?

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Perhaps the scariest part in all this is found in the first chapter, in which the Lord decries all their religious observances and practices. In other words, these were people who professed to serve the Lord and who went through the forms of worship. And yet, what does the Lord say about them and their worship? (*See Isa. 1:11–15.*)

As always, though, the Lord is gracious; as always, He is seeking to save all whom He can. The Cross is all the proof we’ll ever need as to how much the Lord wants us to have salvation. Thus, even in these initial chapters, we see the Lord calling out to His people, offering them a way to avert disaster.

**How do you worship the Lord? What are you thinking about when you do? How much is show, and how much is deeply felt submission, praise, and repentance, and how can you know the difference?**

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## Unclean Lips

It was in the context of the horrible picture presented in yesterday's lesson that the prophet Isaiah gets his call. It came about 740 B.C., the year King Uzziah of Israel died. Uzziah, starting out well, eventually fell into apostasy (*2 Chronicles 26*) and met a terrible end. At this time, Isaiah began his ministry but not before getting a powerful vision of the Lord.

**Read** Isaiah 6:1–8. What kind of reaction does Isaiah have? Why is that so significant, especially for our understanding of the plan of salvation?

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"Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips" (*Isa. 6:5*).

Notice, Isaiah's response wasn't about the power and majesty of God in contrast to his own weakness; nor was it about the eternity of God in contrast to his own temporality. Instead, the response was one dealing with morality. Isaiah, seeing this vision of God, seeing "the train of his robe" (*Isa. 6:1, NIV*) filling the temple, was overcome by the contrast between God's holiness and his own sinfulness. At that moment, he realized that his great problem was a moral one and that his fallen nature and his corruption could be his ruin. Besides, how could he, a "man of unclean lips," speak for the Lord of hosts?

**What** was the solution to this problem?

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The symbolic act of touching his lips with the coal revealed the reality of Isaiah's conversion. He was now forgiven his sin; he had a new life in the Lord, and the fruit of that conversion was revealed in verse 8, when he cried out, "Here am I, send me." Knowing that his sin was purged, he now moved ahead in faith, trusting the righteousness and holiness of God revealed to him in that vision.

**Isaiah's guilt was purged, his sin atoned for. He was born again, and the immediate fruit was his willingness to answer the call, "Who will go for us?" Now ask yourself what kind of fruit is being manifested after your own conversion?**

## Garments That Do Not Last

As we saw earlier, Isaiah spent a lot of time warning about judgment, but he interspersed those warnings with encouraging promises from God. After an explanation of the Lord's devastation of the earth, Isaiah spoke to those in Israel who had, in sincerity, looked forward to the fulfillment of all the promises but who had forgotten the many instances when the Lord led His people through difficult times.

**Read** Isaiah 51:6–8. What message is the Lord giving to the people? What contrasts are presented? What hope, as well?

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Who hasn't seen how easily, and quickly, clothing can be damaged or wear away? It doesn't take much, does it? The finest and richest apparel can be ruined. What an apt parallel for this world and the people on it. How quickly we're here, how quickly we're gone. James, in the New Testament, likens our existence to a "vapor" or a "mist" (*James 4:14*). Welsh poet Dylan Thomas urged his dying father to "not go gentle into that good night" but to "rage, rage against the dying of the light." We can rage all we want, but sooner or later, like a garment, we are gone.

And yet, look at what else Isaiah talks about there: God's salvation, God's righteousness, the garment of Christ's righteousness, which alone brings salvation, a salvation that lasts forever. The Lord here is pointing us to the only two options humans face—dissolution and eternal death or eternal life in a new earth, one that will not "wear out like a garment" (*vs. 6, NIV*) but will remain forever. From Adam and Eve in Eden until the day of Christ's coming, these have been and remain the two ultimate fates of all humanity. They're mutually exclusive, too, meaning it's either one or the other. Which one is a decision only we, as individuals, can make for ourselves?

**Read** Isaiah 51:7, words addressed to those who know what is right, who have God's law in their hearts. What should that mean to us today? How does having the law in our hearts help us know what is right? Is knowing what is right enough in and of itself to cause us to do right, or is more needed? If so, what?

## Garments of Splendor

It's always easy when reading the Old Testament to get caught up in all the warning of gloom and doom. Critics of the Bible love to point out these things and claim, "Who would want to worship or love a God like that?"

Yet, this is selective reading. Time and again the Lord, amid the warnings, offers a way out of the doom. Yes, rebellion and disobedience bring the fruits of destruction. But always the Lord pleads with His people that this doesn't have to be; salvation, righteousness, and security are there, if only we would claim them in the name of the Lord.

**Read** Isaiah 52. What is the message there? What hope is being offered? In that context, what is the meaning of those "garments of splendor" (NIV) that the people are told to wear?

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Again, we have the Lord calling His people back to repentance, obedience, and salvation. The "garments of splendor" are the garments of righteousness, the covering that all have who are surrendered to the Lord and who live by faith and obedience to His commandments. It was never complicated; from Eden onward, all God has asked of His people is to live by faith in obedience to Him.

What's fascinating about Isaiah 52 is how it ends and what comes next. It's no coincidence that, right after calling the people to put on "garments of splendor," Isaiah leads into what is the Old Testament's greatest prophetic description of the substitutionary death of Jesus, the very act that has made the "garments of splendor" available for all who seek them. Only through Christ's life and death, and all that they involve, could humanity be saved from the ruin that sin has brought.

Interesting, too, how earlier on, in Isaiah 52:3, the gift of salvation, something we can't earn or buy, is alluded to. "For thus says the Lord: 'You have sold yourselves for nothing, and you shall be redeemed without money'" (NKJV). How true—we do sell our souls for nothing, for things of this world, a world that will perish like a garment. And this has created a dilemma for us, because it's a situation that we can't buy our way out of or work our way through. It is only by God's grace that we are saved, a grace revealed through the incredible sacrifice made for us on the cross.

## The Garments of Salvation

Some of the most famous texts in all the Bible appear in Luke 4:16–20, when Jesus stood up in His hometown synagogue and read from the book of Isaiah, chapter 61. Then, much to the amazement of those listening, He declared, “This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears” (*Luke 4:21*).

**Read through Isaiah 61.** What is the theme of the chapter? How is the gospel presented here? What themes presented here are picked up and expounded on in the New Testament? See, for instance, verse 6.

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These verses are so rich, filled with all sorts of imagery from the Old Testament that eventually make it into the New. Central to our interest is verse 10: “ ‘I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels’ ” (*NKJV*).

“The provision made is complete, and the eternal righteousness of Christ is placed to the account of every believing soul. The costly, spotless robe, woven in the loom of heaven, has been provided for the repenting, believing sinner, and he may say: ‘I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness.’ ”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 394.

The verb translated “decks himself” comes from a Hebrew word that means to “do the work of a priest,” a prophecy of the New Covenant understanding of all of God’s people, those dressed in the garments of salvation, functioning as “priests.” They function, not as mediators as were the Old Testament priests or as Jesus but more in the sense of witnessing to others about the mercy and grace and salvation of God.

**Look through Isaiah 61 again. What promises can you take from those verses for yourself? How can you realize those promises for yourself; that is, what practices in your life must you change in order for these to be fulfilled in and for you?**

**Further Study:** Read Ellen G. White, "Lost, and Is Found," pp. 206, 210, in *Christ's Object Lessons*; "Instructed in the Law of God," p. 668, in *Prophets and Kings*; "Calvary," p. 754, in *The Desire of Ages*; "A Work of Reform," p. 460, in *The Great Controversy*.

"The white raiment is purity of character, the righteousness of Christ imparted to the sinner. This is indeed a garment of heavenly texture, that can be bought only of Christ for a life of willing obedience."

—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 88.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1** Dwell more on the theme found in the early chapter of Isaiah regarding worship, even true forms of worship, that are unacceptable to God. What kinds of worship are offered today, even by us, which might be unacceptable to the Lord? Is the problem the worship itself or something else, such as what the worshippers are doing with themselves when they are not worshiping? Discuss.
- 2** Isaiah 61:3 reads, " ‘To console those who mourn in Zion, to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified’ " (NKJV). What is going on here? How can we experience the promises given here?
- 3** Delmore Schwartz wrote a short story about a snowfall in New York City that had created, miraculously, beautiful statues throughout the city. People were amazed. The whole city was transfixed. His main character was especially moved, even quit his job so that he could do nothing but stare at the statues, which seemed to have given him a meaning and purpose in life that he got from nothing else. Then, according to the story, a tireless and foul rain fell and overnight all the statues disappeared. They were gone, and things went right back to where they were before the statues came. As the story ended, the main character either fell or jumped in front of a train and died. The point was that by placing hopes in things of this world we are bound for disappointment, because the earth wears away "like a garment." What have been your own experiences with how easily the things of this world disappoint, and what have you learned from those experiences?

# Caught by Christ

by JIM FONG

I grew up in a traditional Chinese family. My parents worship ancestors and follow the traditional religions of China. They gave me an excellent upbringing and encouraged me to excel in school. Their influence helped me get into the best schools, and when I graduated I thought I was pretty good—like a little god.

I went to Australia to continue my studies. There I met another Chinese student who invited me to attend a care group—a small Bible study group. The small group and the Bible studies drew me to God. I am a logical person, and I enjoyed studying Bible prophecy. I reasoned that if so many Bible prophesies have been fulfilled, then prophesies about the future must be true, as well. I wanted to know where we came from and where we are going. The studies gave me hope about the future. Heaven became my goal.

As a student, my life is really busy, but I discovered that the Sabbath was a precious respite from work and studies. I began keeping the Sabbath and discovered that even with fewer hours of study I still did well on my exams and papers. I knew that God was blessing me.

I used to think I could solve my own problems. But when I repeatedly failed my Australian driver's license test, I became frustrated. Finally, I surrendered my need to God, and He gave me peace and helped me pass the test on my next try. I've learned to pray about everything and let God control the outcome.

God taught me about prayer and about the Sabbath. But I made excuses about baptism—I wasn't good enough, I was too busy. Then at a retreat for young people, God impressed me that I needed to commit my life to Him through baptism. When I surrendered, I felt such peace!

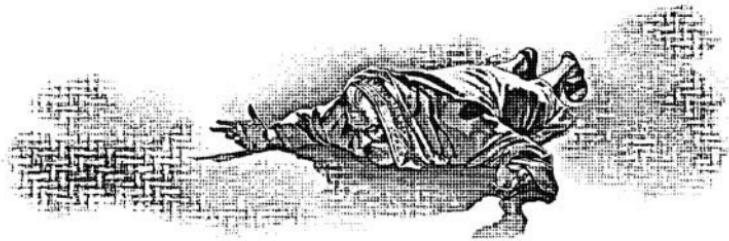
I'm seeing God work miracles in my life every day. He has given me a great job right out of college, even though I'm a foreign student with little experience. I understand now that everything in this world is under God's control.

I thank God for my friends at the university who invited me to study the Bible with them and become part of their care group. I didn't know it then, but this group is a Global Mission church plant, supported by donors and mission offerings from people around the world. What a great God we serve, and what a great church family we have. Thank you!



JIM FONG (left) shares his faith in Melbourne, Australia.

# A Brand Plucked From the Fire



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** Zechariah 1–3, Rev. 12:10, Exod. 3:2–14, Eph. 2:8–10, John 14:15.

**Memory Text:** “Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment” (Zechariah 3:4).

However easy to forget, the great controversy between Christ and Satan is the ultimate driving force behind reality. Wars, crime, violence, and the whole seething and boiling cauldron of human tragedy are but surface manifestations of the underlying conflict that began in heaven (Rev. 12:7), a universal struggle that impacts not just every human but all creation (Rom. 8:20–22).

One thing, though, we must never forget. The great controversy isn't over Middle East oil or over the epochal geopolitical shifts in the military and economic hegemony. It's over the salvation of the human race, one soul at a time. Nations come and go, power structures come and go, grand themes of history and ideology come and go; only the saved, those covered in the robe of Christ's righteousness, last forever. Satan doesn't care about money, power, politics, not in and of themselves—he cares about souls, about taking as many down to ruin with him as possible. Christ, through His death, has made it possible to save everyone from that ruin. The essence of the great controversy is, at the core, people choosing eternal ruin or eternal life. All the rest is essentially fluff.

\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 28.

## Zealous for Jerusalem

**Read** Zechariah 1, 2. Though you might not understand all the details and symbols, what is the message the Lord is giving to His people here? What is the background to these events? What clear biblical principles are seen in these chapters, what promises are made, what hope is offered to the Lord's people, and on what conditions? How are these same principles manifested among us today, regardless of how different our immediate circumstances are in contrast to the situation depicted in Zechariah?

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Although Jerusalem lay in ruins because of the conquest of the Babylonians 70 years earlier, God provided hope for the future of the city. Zechariah received the message from the Lord that not only the temple but Jerusalem would be rebuilt.

Zechariah began by declaring to his listeners that the Lord had been displeased, “sore displeased,” with their fathers. But Zechariah immediately gave courage to those who were listening by assuring them that if they would turn to God in humility and repentance, He would turn to them (*Zech. 1:1–3*). Zechariah’s visions were meant to give strength and inspiration to continue the building of the temple in Jerusalem for the worship of God.

Following the first vision of Zechariah, recounted in chapter 1, the Lord gave some incredible encouragement, saying, “I am jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with a great jealousy” (*vs. 14*).

And then this: “Therefore, this is what the Lord says: ‘I will return to Jerusalem with mercy, and there my house will be rebuilt. And the measuring line will be stretched out over Jerusalem,’” declares the Lord Almighty” (*Zech. 1:16, NIV*).

The man with the measuring line portrayed the plans for the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem and the temple in Zechariah’s time. But with only the foundations laid, the building of the temple seemed like an impossibility.

Just before Zechariah’s vision of the filthy garments of Joshua, he received a message of promise to communicate to the Jews, recorded in Zechariah 2:10–13. God told them to “sing and rejoice,” and then He promised to live with them. How encouraging that message must have been as the people of God attempted to join together to worship Him.

## The Accuser and the Accused

**“Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right side to accuse him” (Zech. 3:1, NIV). What grand and important truths, especially in the context of the great controversy (and in the immediate context of the vision itself), are revealed here?**

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A few crucial points are powerfully represented here. First, who is the accused but Joshua, the high priest, who stands as a representative of all God’s people. Pictured in this vision as a priest facing the Lord, Joshua represents Israel in all their faults, shortcomings, and sins. There is no question: the people are not innocent, they are not sinless, they are not deserving of the promised restoration that the Lord is offering them and which they are claiming for themselves by faith and repentance.

And, of course, Satan is there to accuse them, to argue against their repentance, their desire to reform, and their desire to find the mercy and grace of God. What better way to discourage people in the great controversy than to make them think their sins are just too great for the Lord to forgive? How many souls, all through history, and even today, have fallen prey to this—one of Satan’s most wicked devices? What makes the threat so powerful is that he doesn’t have to lie about our sins, does he? All he has to do is remind us of them and, without knowing about God’s grace, we would be crushed with a sense of hopelessness and loss. Even without an accuser to throw them up in God’s face, our sins are more than enough to condemn us.

The Hebrew verb translated here as “accuse” comes from the same word as “Satan”; it’s the same three Hebrew consonants that form the foundation for both words. No question, Satan is the accuser, but we all should know the famous text: “And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night” (Rev. 12:10).

**Though it is not good to dwell on our sins, at times we need to take a hard and honest look at ourselves (regardless of whether or not Satan is whispering in our ears). What changes must you immediately choose to make in your life, and what Bible promises can you claim in order to make those promises real and effective? Think of what’s at stake if you allow sin to dominate you.**

## The Angel of the Lord

So far, in Zechariah 3, we've focused on two personages, Satan and the high priest Joshua. But there's a third personage, clearly the central figure in the narrative: "the Angel of the Lord" (*NKJV*).

**Who** is "the Angel of the Lord"? See *Exod. 3:2–14, Zech. 3:1, 2.*

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What we see here, in a graphic form, is a microcosm of the great controversy, a battle that is waged over every soul who has given his or her life into the hands of Jesus, the Lord, in faith and repentance. Remember the context: Israel, severely chastised, "humbled themselves before God, and returned to Him with true repentance."—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 468. It was at this time that Satan's work as the accuser was revealed. What exactly he said, we aren't told, but given biblical history and given what we know about human nature, it probably wasn't a pretty picture.

**Read** Zechariah 3:1–3. What does the reality of Joshua's garments tell us?

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The fact that Joshua as the high priest was deemed the one in filthy garments only highlights the depth of sin. From the earliest days of the covenant between God and Israel, the priesthood as a whole, the Levites, and the high priest in particular were special even among the chosen nation, called out by the Lord for a unique role and function in Israel, a holy role and function (*Exod. 38:21, Num. 1:47–53, 3:12*). They, of all Israel, should have been, symbolically, in the cleanest of garments.

All that aside, the rest of the chapter makes it clear that, despite their past, despite their shortcomings, "the Angel of the Lord" is there to defend them against the accusations of Satan, regardless of how true or false those accusations are. The Angel of the Lord, Jesus, is there to save and redeem. This is, without exception, the most important truth in all Scripture.

**How crucial that we never forget, regardless of our unworthiness, the role of "the Angel of the Lord" in our behalf. How can we keep this truth before us at all times, yet not deceive ourselves by drawing false conclusions from it? What might some of those false conclusions be? Be prepared to discuss your answer in class on Sabbath.**

## Change of Clothes

**Read** prayerfully and carefully all of Zechariah 3; look at the steps in the process. This is how God's people, though sinners, are saved. What can you learn about the plan of salvation through the vision here?

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In verses 3–5, before the new clothes are placed on Joshua, the old filthy ones are removed. According to the text, that means that the Lord has “‘removed your iniquity from you’” (vs. 4, NKJV). What, though, does that mean in the life of the person redeemed? Was Joshua now sinless, perfect in heart and soul and mind, never to fall or sin again? Was that the state Joshua had to reach before the change of garments could be placed on him? If so, what hope would any of us have?

Instead, what it means is that the guilt and condemnation that belonged to him had been taken away. Talking about Joshua here, Ellen G. White said, “His own sins and those of his people were pardoned. Israel were clothed with ‘change of raiment’—the righteousness of Christ imputed to them. The miter placed upon Joshua’s head was such as was worn by the priests and bore the inscription, ‘Holiness to the Lord,’ signifying that, notwithstanding his former transgressions, he was now qualified to minister before God in His sanctuary.”—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 469.

**What** does “the Angel of the Lord” say to Joshua in verse 7 *after* the change of clothes, and why is that order so important?

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It was only *after* the special clothing was given to him that Joshua received the admonition to obey the Lord and walk in His ways. This point mustn’t be overlooked—the righteousness of Christ was granted to him by faith, was credited to him apart from his walking in “[God’s] ways” or from keeping “[God’s] command.” Without being covered in those “rich robes” (Zech. 3:4, NKJV), all his efforts to obey God’s commandments and to keep His “ways” would have left him in the same filthy garments he started with.

## “An Effectual Plea”

In the world of Christianity, many people have not experienced the robe of righteousness and do not understand its potential. However, this concept is absolutely vital to anyone who wishes for peace and joy in his or her relationship with his or her Lord.

Too often, there's a motivation to do good so that we can be saved. The message here in Zechariah should show us that is not how it works, nor how it can work. Again, here's Ellen G. White on what was happening in this vision: “But while we should realize our sinful condition, we are to rely upon Christ as our righteousness, our sanctification, and our redemption. We cannot answer the charges of Satan against us. Christ alone can make an effectual plea in our behalf. He is able to silence the accuser with arguments founded not upon our merits, but on His own.”—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 472.

That last sentence should become emblazoned in the hearts of all of God's people, a truth that we must know not only intellectually but experientially, learning to rely moment by moment, not on our good works, no matter how good they really are, but only on the merits of Christ. Or to put it in David's words: “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered” (*Ps. 32:1*).

**Keeping** what we have seen in Zechariah 3 in mind, read Ephesians 2:8–10, John 14:15, and Romans 6:1–4. How do these verses help us understand all that is involved in what we have been shown in Zechariah about what it means to be wearing “rich robes”?

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Now that Joshua was covered in the garments of holiness, his life was to reflect that holiness. We are to exert all the God-given power offered the soul to have victory over sin. No sin should be tolerated or excused in our lives, not when there are so many promises of victory for the one who has given himself or herself to Christ. Christ's life proved we can live in obedience to God's law. When we sin, we are choosing to sin. How important that we always think long and hard on the implications of that choice.

**What are the sins you especially struggle with? What promises can you claim so that you can have the victory over them through Christ?**

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**Further Study:** Read Ellen G. White Comments, pp. 1092, 1093, in *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4; “Joshua and the Angel,” pp. 582–592, in *Prophets and Kings*; “Shall Not God Avenge His Own?” pp. 169, 170, in *Christ’s Object Lessons*; “Joshua and the Angel,” pp. 467–476, in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5.

“When Satan seeks to cover the people of God with blackness, and ruin them, Christ interposes. Although they have sinned, Christ has taken the guilt of their sins upon His own soul. He has snatched the race as a brand from the fire. By His human nature He is linked with man, while through His divine nature He is one with the infinite God. Help is brought within the reach of perishing souls. The adversary is rebuked. . . .

“Notwithstanding the defects of the people of God, Christ does not turn away from the objects of His care. He has the power to change their raiment. He removes the filthy garments, He places upon the repenting, believing ones His own robe of righteousness, and writes pardon against their names on the records of heaven.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 169, 170.

“As the people of God afflict their souls before Him, pleading for purity of heart, the command is given, ‘Take away the filthy garments,’ and the encouraging words are spoken, ‘Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment.’ Zechariah 3:4. The spotless robe of Christ’s righteousness is placed upon the tried, tempted, faithful children of God. The despised remnant are clothed in glorious apparel, nevermore to be defiled by the corruptions of the world.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 591.

### Discussion Questions:

- ① As a class, go over your answers to Tuesday’s final questions.
- ② Dwell more on the fact that it was only after the change of garments that Joshua was given the command to obey. Why is that so important to remember? What does this tell us about what our salvation is based upon, as opposed to what the results of that salvation are? Why must we always understand that distinction?
- ③ Think of the good news that we can be given a whole new change of clothes, regardless of how filthy our garments have been. What should that mean to you in your own life, your own attitudes, your whole way of looking at the world and others, knowing that you have been granted this completely new set of clothes, which reveal the new life offered to you in Christ?

# Fishers of Men

by BENJAMIN D. SCHOUN

Sri Lanka is a beautiful island that lies in the warm waters of the Indian Ocean, off the southern tip of India. For 30 years the nation was wracked by civil war, but at last peace has come, and the people can once more hope for a better life. Farmers can plant their rice crops without fear, and men can go fishing in the rich waters that surround their island.

But another threat has risen, a threat to religious freedom. Recently the government of Sri Lanka has passed a law forbidding religious conversions. Now anyone caught distributing religious material risks being convicted of a crime. How can the 3,600 Seventh-day Adventists living on this island share God's love with others without risking their lives, their jobs, and their future? How can they invite people, as Jesus did, to "follow Me"?

Two brothers who make their living fishing in the sea near their home bought a small radio to listen to as they sit for long hours in their boat. One day while searching for something of interest to listen to, they came across a station they hadn't heard before. It was a message of hope, a message of God's love.

Day after day they listened to programs on this newly discovered station, which identified itself as Adventist World Radio. They responded to the messages of hope and peace and accepted Jesus as their personal Savior.

They shared what they were learning with their families, and during the long hours out in their boat, these brothers turned up the volume on their little radio so that the men fishing nearby could enjoy the message, as well. Their favorite program was called *The Voice of Hope*, and the words of hope warmed the hearts of many who listened as they fished.

As fellow fishers asked the brothers questions, the new believers grew bold. They organized a prayer group, and several who have come have found hope and life in the gospel of Jesus. Now, in spite of the new legal restrictions, these men ask for literature and Bibles so they can study and grow in their faith and knowledge of Jesus.

Please pray for these modern-day fishers of men and all the believers in Sri Lanka and elsewhere in the world where the devil seeks to slow the Lord's work. Your mission offerings help support the work in difficult places.

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BENJAMIN D. SCHOUN is president of Adventist World Radio.

# The Prodigal’s New Clothes



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week’s Study:** Gen. 4:1–8; 25:25–34; Luke 15:4–32; John 11:9, 10; Rom. 5:12–20.

**Memory Text:** “ ‘ “But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found” ’ ” (Luke 15:32, NIV).

W. Somerset Maugham wrote a short story called “Rain” about a missionary in the South Seas who “converted” a prostitute to the gospel. He poured himself, heart and soul, into seeking to win her, though at times his methods seemed harsh and unforgiving. In fact, he insisted that she return to the United States (from which she was fleeing) in order to finish out a jail sentence, all despite her desperate pleas to spare her from the torture, degradation, and ignominy that awaited her in prison. Doing her jail time, the missionary insisted, was just part of the process of repentance that she needed to go through, and thus she had to return.

The story ended, however, unexpectedly. The missionary killed himself, his mangled corpse found washed up on the beach. What happened? Apparently, spending all this time with the prostitute, he fell into sin with her and, unable to forgive himself—he killed himself instead.

What those characters needed was what we all as sinners need—a personal experience of the grace and assurance that Jesus revealed in the parable of the prodigal son.

\*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 4.

## Same Parents, Same Food

“ ‘There was a man who had two sons’ ” (*Luke 15:11, NIV*). In this parable, the two sons born to the same father represent two character traits. The older son apparently demonstrated loyalty, perseverance, and industry. The younger one was, no doubt, unwilling to work, unwilling to be accountable, and unwilling to take his share of responsibility. Both were from the same heritage. Both probably received identical love and commitment from the same father. One son was, it seemed, faithful; one was disrespectful. What caused the difference?

**What other stories does this remind you of?** *Gen. 4:1–8, 25:25–34.*

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It’s a strange phenomenon, is it not, one that is seen all the time. Two (or more) siblings from the same parents, living in the same home, have the same teachings, the same love, the same *food* even, and one becomes spiritual, faithful, and determined to serve the Lord, while the other, for whatever reason, goes in the opposite direction. However hard to understand, it does show us the powerful reality of free will. Some might see something significant in the fact that it was the *younger* of the two brothers who rebelled, but who knows the reason why he did what he did?

**Read Luke 15:12. What lesson can we learn from how the father reacted to the son’s request? What does that tell us about how God relates to us?**

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The text does not say what kind of dialogue ensued between the father and the son or whether the father remonstrated with him, asking him to reconsider, asking him not to be so rash, asking him to think through his actions. Most likely he did, but in the end, the son was given the “portion of the goods” that were his, and off he went. All through the Bible, we can see this same principle: God allows human beings the freedom to make their own choices, to go their own way, and to live as they want. Of course, as we all know so well, our choices come with consequences, consequences that we don’t always imagine or foresee.

**What have been the results of some of your own free choices lately? Not so easy to turn back the clock, is it?**

## Spreading His Wings

Picture the father as he watched his emboldened son put things together in his backpack, ready to leave home. Maybe he asked his son where he was going, what his plan was for employment, or what his dreams were for his future. Who knows what answers the son gave. They probably weren't encouraging, at least to the father. The son, meanwhile, was more than likely ready for the good times ahead.

After all, why not? He was young and adventurous, had some cash to spend and a world to see. Life on the family farm probably seemed dull and boring in contrast to all the possibilities that the world presented to him.

**Read** Luke 15:13–19. What kind of repentance do we see here? Does it seem like a true repentance, that he's sorry for what he did, or that he is sorry only for the *consequences* of what he did? What hints are there in the verses that could give us the answer?

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It's hard to know how this story might have turned out had things gone well for the prodigal. Suppose he found ways to keep the money flowing in and to keep the good times coming? It's not likely, at least from what we see here, that he would have been coming back "on his knees," is it? Who among us, at times, hasn't been really sorry, not so much for our sins but for the consequences of them, especially when we get caught? Even the hardest pagan is going to be sorry he committed adultery if, in the process, he picked up herpes, gonorrhea, or some other sexually transmitted disease. There's nothing Christian about sorrow for the pain that comes from our wrong choices, is there?

What, then, about this young man? Though there's no question the terrible circumstances he found himself in brought about a changed attitude that might not have otherwise occurred, the thoughts of his heart, as revealed in the texts, do reveal a sense of true humility and a realization of the fact that he sinned both against his father and against God. The speech he prepared in his heart did seem to show the sincerity of his repentance.

Sometimes we need the bad consequences of our actions to awaken us to the reality of our sins, don't we? That is, only after the suffering comes from our actions do we truly repent of those actions and not just from the results. What about yourself and whatever situations you're facing now? Why not choose to avoid the sin and spare yourself all the sorrow and the repentance that (one hopes) will follow?

## You Can Go Home Again

In the early part of the twentieth century, novelist Thomas Wolfe wrote a literary classic, *You Can't Go Home Again*, about a man who leaves his humble family origins in the south, goes to New York, makes it big as a writer, and then seeks to return to his roots. It wasn't an easy transition; hence the title of the book.

**In the story of the prodigal, who is the one who makes the long journey in order to be reunited with his father? Contrast that to, for instance, the parable of the lost sheep and lost coin (*Luke 15:4–10*). What might be the important difference here?**

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Perhaps, in the two other parables, the lost objects didn't even know that they were lost (certainly the case with the coin), and they couldn't make it back even if they tried; whereas, in the case of the prodigal, he walked away from the "truth," as it were, and it was only after he was in the darkness (*see John 11:9, 10*) that he realized just how lost he was. All through salvation history, God has had to deal with those who, having light, have purposely turned away from that light and gone their own way. The good news of this parable is that, even in the cases of those who turned their backs on Him after knowing His goodness and love, God is still willing to restore them to the position that they once held in His covenant family. Though, just as the young man chose of his own free will to leave, he had to choose by his own free will to come back. It works the same way with all of us.

What's interesting, too, about these parables is the context in which they are being told. Read Luke 15:1, 2. Look at the different people who are listening to what Jesus is saying. What a powerful message it should be to us all that, instead of giving warnings about end-time apocalyptic events or about doom and judgment upon the unrepentant, Jesus gives parables showing the Father's earnest love and care for all of those who are lost, regardless of the situation that led to their being in that position.

**Have you known people who have walked away from God? What hope can you take from this story that all is not lost? How important that we all pray for those who still haven't learned the lesson that the prodigal so painfully did.**

## The Best Robe

As we saw, the son himself had to make the decision to return. There was no compulsion on his father's part. God forces no one to be obedient; if He didn't force Satan to be obedient in heaven or Adam and Eve to be obedient in Eden, why do it now, long after the consequences of disobedience have wreaked havoc on humanity? (*Rom. 5:12–20, 21*).

**Read** Luke 15:20–24. How does the father react to the son's confession? How much penance, how many works, how many acts of restitution was the son required to do before the father accepted him? What message is in there for us? See also *Jer. 31:17–20*.

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The son did confess to his father, but you can get the impression from reading the text that the father almost didn't hear it. Look at the order: the father ran to meet his son, fell on him, and kissed him. Sure, the confession was fine, and it probably did the son more good than the father, but at that point the son's actions spoke louder than his words.

The father, too, told the servants to bring "the best robe" and place it on the son. The Greek word translated "best" (from *protos*) often means "first" or "foremost." The father was giving him the best he had to offer.

Think of the context, too: the son had been living in poverty for who knows how long. He probably didn't come home dressed in the finest of apparel, to say the least. After all, he had been feeding pigs up until then. The contrast, no doubt, between what he was wearing when he was embraced by his father (notice, too, the father didn't wait until he was cleaned up before throwing himself on him) and the robe that was placed on him couldn't have been starker.

What this shows, among other things, is that the restoration, at least between the father and the son, was at that moment complete. If we see "the best robe" as the robe of Christ's righteousness, then all that was needed was provided for right then and there. The prodigal had repented, confessed, and turned from his ways. The father supplied the rest. If that's not a symbol of salvation, what is?

**What's fascinating here, too, is that there is no "I told you so" from the father. There wasn't any need for it, was there? Sin reaps its own wages. When dealing with people who come back to the Lord after falling away, how can we learn not to throw their sins up before them?**

## The Father's Own Garment

Ellen G. White, in *Christ's Object Lessons*, pages 203, 204, adds an interesting detail to the story that's not found in the texts themselves. Describing the scene of the father approaching the son as he humbly comes home, she writes, "The father will permit no contemptuous eye to mock at his son's misery and tatters. He takes from his own shoulders the broad, rich mantle, and wraps it around the son's wasted form, and the youth sobs out his repentance, saying, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.' The father holds him close to his side, and brings him home. No opportunity is given him to ask a servant's place. He is a son, who shall be honored with the best the house affords, and whom the waiting men and women shall respect and serve."

"The father said to his servants, 'Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat and be merry; for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry.' "

**What** insights does this reference give us into the story as a whole, and what does it tell us about God's character?

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The father wants, right away, to cover up the shame of the son's mistakes. What a message for us about learning to let the past go, to not dwell on others' past mistakes or our own. Some of the worst sins are not known now, but one day will be (*1 Cor. 4:5*); like Paul, we need to forget what's past and press toward the future (*Phil. 3:13, 14*).

**Read** Luke 15:24. What does the father mean when he says that his son was dead but is alive again? How are we to understand those very strong words?

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In the end, there's no middle ground in the ultimate issues of salvation. When all things finally and totally wrap up (*Rev. 21:5*), and the great controversy is ended, all human beings either will be eternally alive or eternally dead. There's nothing in between.

Certainly something to think about as we make our daily choices, both good and bad, as did the prodigal son.

**Further Study:** Read Ellen G. White, "Lost and Is Found," pp. 198–211; "A Great Gulf Fixed," p. 260, in *Christ's Object Lessons*; "The Last Journey From Galilee," pp. 495, 496, in *The Desire of Ages*; "Parables of the Lost," pp. 100–104, in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3.

"Mark how tender and pitiful the Lord is in His dealings with His creatures. He loves His erring child, and entreats him to return. The Father's arm is placed about His repentant son; the Father's garments cover his rags; the ring is placed upon his finger as a token of his royalty. And yet how many there are who look upon the prodigal not only with indifference, but with contempt. Like the Pharisee, they say, 'God, I thank Thee, that I am not as other men' (*Luke 18:11*). But how, think you, does God look upon those who, while claiming to be coworkers with Christ, while the soul is making its struggle against the flood of temptation, stand by like the elder brother in the parable, stubborn, self-willed, selfish?"—Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers*, p. 140.

"Strength and grace have been provided through Christ to be brought by ministering angels to every believing soul. None are so sinful that they cannot find strength, purity, and righteousness in Jesus, who died for them. He is waiting to strip them of their garments stained and polluted with sin, and to put upon them the white robes of righteousness; He bids them live and not die."—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 53.

### Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Discuss more the question of how siblings from the same parents, the same home, and the same environment can go in such different spiritual directions. How are we to understand that?
- ❷ How do you help those who—having turned away from the Lord, gone into the world, and damaged themselves and others in the process—want to put their past behind them but can't, because no matter which way they turn, the results of their past choices stare them right in the face? What hope, what promises, or what help can you give them?
- ❸ It's one thing to know that you are messed up, as did the prodigal. What about those who have "left their father's home," so to speak, and things are going quite well for them? Let's be honest: not everyone who leaves the Lord winds up feeding pigs. Some end up owning the pig farm! What can be done to help them realize that, despite their circumstances, they have made a fatal choice?

# Finding Faith

by SONIA SOMUAH ASANTE

I grew up in Ghana. When I was 17, I went to live with my aunt, for my mother left Ghana to work in another country. We were Christians but not Seventh-day Adventists. A friend was studying at Valley View University, the Adventist university in Ghana. She suggested that I complete my high school studies at the university so I could qualify for admission to the university. I knew the school was a Christian institution, but I knew nothing about Adventists. I decided to apply to study there.

I was surprised to learn that we had worship every evening in the dormitory and attended church on Saturday. I wondered what strange people these Adventists were. I didn't mind the dormitory worships, but it was hard to start going to church on Saturdays. For me religion was a Sunday activity.

At first I worried that I was disobeying God's will by going to church on Saturday. But my friends helped me understand that Saturday was God's chosen day of rest, not Sunday. They helped me understand the principles behind other practices of Adventists too.

During a Week of Spiritual Emphasis, the pastor invited students to surrender their lives entirely to God. I responded to his call. I studied the Bible with some friends, and in time I was baptized, along with more than 50 other students.

My mother accepted my decision, but my aunt worried that I had joined a cult. During my next school break, I returned home to talk to her about my new faith. She was convinced that the Seventh-day Adventist Church is a cult, not a church.

I graduated from high school and enrolled as a university student at Valley View University. I pray that my family will want to know more about my new faith and will understand what I believe. I want to see them in the Adventist church one day.

Your mission offerings help support Valley View University and many other schools around the world. Last year part of a Thirteenth Sabbath Offering went to help the university build a new church on campus. Thank you for all you've done to make it possible for me to study at an Adventist university, where students like me can find Christ or develop a deeper faith while we're still young.

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SONIA SOMUAH ASANTE is in her final year of studies at Valley View University near Accra, Ghana.

# The Wedding Garment



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** Matthew 21; 22:1–14; Rev. 21:2, 9; Eccles. 12:14; Dan. 7:10; Gen. 3:9–19.

**Memory Text:** “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (*Romans 8:1*).

Christian history is full of dark pages. Horrible things have been done by professed followers of Christ, and according to our understanding of prophecy, more evil will be done in His name, too, before Jesus returns.

This week we'll look at a fascinating parable, a parable that reveals the painful truth that not all who profess to be followers of Christ really are. Of course, who are we to make the judgment between the faithful and the unfaithful? Who are we to behold the “mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?” (*Matt. 7:3*). We don't make that judgment. But God does.

“The guests at the gospel feast are those who profess to serve God, those whose names are written in the book of life. But not all who profess to be Christians are true disciples. Before the final reward is given, it must be decided who are fitted to share the inheritance of the righteous. This decision must be made prior to the second coming of Christ in the clouds of heaven; for when He comes, His reward is with Him, ‘to give every man according as his work shall be.’ Rev. 22:12.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 310.

\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 11.

## Days of Fervor

Matthew 21, recounting some of the last days of Jesus' earthly ministry, is filled with drama, tension, and excitement. It also reveals, as the Bible often does, the fearful ability of our hearts to deceive us and the power of the evil one to blind our minds to the most obvious truths. It's easy for us, looking back, to think, *How could those leaders have been so hard, so blind, so indignant in the face of all the evidence that Jesus had given them?*

Yet, we mustn't fool ourselves. Is there any reason to think—even as Seventh-day Adventists, living with so much light—that we are much different? Do we not, at times, show a hard and callous indifference to truth, particularly when it interferes with our pet sins and desires and worldliness? Sure, God loves us, Christ died for us, and forgiveness is available to all. But those same words could be said about the people in this chapter, as well, the ones who not only turned their backs on Jesus but worked against Him. How careful we need to be, for we deceive ourselves if we think that we can't be deceived as well.

**Read** through Matthew 21, which forms the background for the parable in the next chapter. Though so much is happening there, what is the basic theme of the chapter? That is, if you had to write a summary of it in a few lines, what would it be? More important, what spiritual lessons can we take from it for ourselves?

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Perhaps the most fascinating lines in the entire chapter are the last two. No matter how hard the people's hearts were to Jesus, something of His message must have gotten through, because they knew He had been talking about them. It would have been one thing had they completely missed His point, but they didn't. That was the problem; they seemed to have understood it, at least well enough to want to get Jesus out of the way. How fascinating, too, that it was the people themselves, the Jewish crowds drawn to Jesus, who restrained the leaders from arresting Him then. How sad—those who should have been teachers of others were the ones who had the most to learn and, in many cases, never learned it. When they finally do, it will be too late (*Rom. 14:10*).

## The King's Invitation

It's one thing to have a wedding. It's another thing for a king to have a wedding. And to be invited to a wedding put on by a king for *his own son* would have been a very high honor indeed. The wedding imagery there, particularly of the son, is, of course, an obvious reference to the relationship between Jesus and His church (*Rev. 21:2, 9; Eph. 5:21–23*).

**Read** Matthew 22:1–8. How does this part of the parable fit in with what we saw in the preceding chapter? What same theme appears?

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Notice, too, how all the preparations were done by the king: he arranged for the marriage, he prepared the dinner, and he had the animals slain. Indeed, “all things are ready: come unto the marriage” was the message. In the end, all that the people had to do was accept what was offered them.

Notice, too, the things that caused the people to scorn the invitation. Some made light of it; that is, they just didn't take it seriously, didn't think it mattered, didn't think it important. That could symbolize those today who just don't take the claims of God seriously, who, for various reasons, never open themselves up to truth. Others “went their ways.” Jesus said that the path to salvation is narrow (*Matt. 7:14*); people can find all sorts of excuses to avoid and reject the invitation. For others, it was simply the lure of material things. And finally, while some just ignored the invitation, others actually persecuted those who gave it. Whatever the reason, they all were left out.

Think, too, about the words of the king, saying that those who had rejected the invitation “were not worthy.” How do we understand that, in light of the universality of all human sin and sinfulness? Are any of us really worthy to be invited to the king's feast? In the end, as we'll see, “worthiness” in the biblical sense comes from what Christ does for us; our worthiness is not in ourselves but in what we allow God to do for us—and in us.

**Of the reasons given above for those who rejected the invitation, which one do you find the most difficult to deal with in your own life? What promises can you claim that will enable you to resist it?**

## Those Who Came to the Feast

With the rejection of two calls, the king now sent out another one, this time to “as many as ye shall find” (*Matt. 22:9*), and ordered his servants to invite them to the wedding. This time, however, the reception was different, because, according to the text, they went out and “gathered together all as many as they found” (*Matt. 22:10*).

**Read** the rest of the parable (*Matt. 22:9–14*). Who were the ones who came to the wedding feast? What does it mean that some who came were “both bad and good”?

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Have you ever noticed that some of the meanest, nastiest, and most hateful people are professed Christians? Or that some of the most judgmental, condemnatory, hypocritical, and downright evil people are those who go to church, who claim the promises of salvation, and who profess assurance of salvation?

This is nothing new. How do we understand, for instance, the faith of the Crusaders, so dedicated to the Lord Jesus that they pillaged and plundered their way to the Holy Land? One eyewitness reported that “our troops boiled pagan adults in cooking pots. They impaled children on spits and devoured them grilled.” How could those horrors have been done in the name of Jesus?

It’s easy (you say): *these people weren’t real Christians*. But how do you know? How can you judge their hearts, what they were taught, what opportunities they had to know better? Might not some have later repented, claiming the same promises of forgiveness and grace that we do? What about the horrendous acts of those who turned out to be, it seems, pretty pious souls? Who are we to judge hearts?

We shouldn’t judge—but God does, should, and will (*Rom. 14:10; Heb. 10:30; Eccles. 12:14; Dan. 7:9, 10*). Seventh-day Adventists call it the “investigative judgment,” and it is revealed in this parable.

**Think through some of the things that have been done by professed Christians through history, sometimes in the name of Jesus too. How does this parable help us understand how God will deal justly with them?**

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**What** does the garment represent in the parable? Why should rejection of it be literally a matter of eternal life or death?

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Unless one believes in once saved always saved, then what is the problem with the idea that God, at some point in history, ultimately and finally separates the wheat from the tares (*Matt. 13:24–30*), the wise from the foolish (*Matt. 25:1–13*), the faithful from the unfaithful (*Matt. 25:14–30*), and those who are truly covered in His righteousness and those who aren't (*Matt. 22:1–14*) from among those who have professed to follow Him, especially when some of them have done, and might still do, horrible things, maybe even in His name too?

Will there not be some kind of final reckoning among the true and the false who claim the same promises of salvation that we always do, especially in a religion whose basis is that you are saved by what Someone else has done for you?

Think it through, if salvation were purely by our works—it would be easy; just tally up our works. Either they add up or they don't. Period. But in a faith where salvation rests on the merits of what Someone else has done for us, a faith in which the righteousness needed for salvation exists in Someone other than ourselves, the issue gets more subtle, more nuanced. Hence, a judgment by One who never makes a mistake would seem more necessary here than in a religion where works are the standard, would it not?

And that is what this parable is all about—God separating the true and false from among those who have professed to follow Him. And what is the deciding factor? Whether or not they have been clothed in the wonderful garment of righteousness that Christ has freely offered to all.

This parable draws a significant distinction between being a member of a church and being a sinner saved by the righteousness of Christ. They clearly aren't the same thing, are they? Look at your life, your deeds, your actions, your words, your thoughts, and your attitude toward friends and enemies. Do they reflect someone wearing Christ's robe of righteousness or someone who has just come to the feast?

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## The Investigation

As expressed yesterday, unless you believe that once a person is “saved,” that person can never fall away, it’s hard to imagine that God wouldn’t have a final separation between those clothed in His righteousness and those just claiming to be. That’s essentially what this parable is about. Again, for a religion based not on our own works but on Someone else’s works for us (which we claim by faith), how could there not be this final divine separation?

**Read** Ecclesiastes 12:14 and 1 Corinthians 4:5 in light of Matthew 22:11. What’s the one point that they have in common, and why is that important?

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As Seventh-day Adventists, with our understanding of the great controversy (*Rev. 12:7–9, 1 Pet. 5:8, Job 1, 2*) and the interest of the entire universe in this great controversy (*Dan. 7:10, 1 Cor. 4:9, Eph. 3:10*), we easily can reject the argument—taken from 2 Timothy 2:19, “the Lord knoweth them that are his”—used against the idea that an investigation of works is biblical. The Lord *does know* those that are His, but the rest of the universe, ourselves included, don’t.

It’s so important that we keep the big picture in mind: the interest of the whole universe in what is going on here with sin, rebellion, salvation, and God’s plan to deal with everything in an open, just, and fair way.

The very idea of a judgment of any kind presupposes some kind of investigation, does it not? Look at Genesis 3:9–19; from the first moment after sin entered, God Himself got directly involved, asking questions to answers that He already knew. Just as this “investigation” wasn’t for Himself (it helped Adam and Eve understand the gravity of what they had done), the same can be said of the investigative judgment: it doesn’t reveal anything new to God; it’s for the benefit of others.

Just as in this Genesis judgment, where God’s grace overruled the death sentence (*see Gen. 3:15*), His grace does the same for all of God’s true followers, now and in the judgment—when they need it the most!

*An investigation of your works? Is there any wonder that you need to have Christ’s righteousness covering you at all times or that salvation has to be by grace and not by works? What hope would you have if—when all your works were investigated—you didn’t have Christ’s robe covering you?*

**Further Study:** Read Ellen G. White, “Without a Wedding Garment,” pp. 307–319, in *Christ’s Object Lessons*.

“But the plan of redemption had a yet broader and deeper purpose than the salvation of man. It was not for this alone that Christ came to the earth; it was not merely that the inhabitants of this little world might regard the law of God as it should be regarded; but it was to vindicate the character of God before the universe.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 68.

“Yet Satan was not then destroyed. The angels did not even then understand all that was involved in the great controversy. The principles at stake were to be more fully revealed. And for the sake of man, Satan’s existence must be continued. Man as well as angels must see the contrast between the Prince of light and the prince of darkness. He must choose whom he will serve.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 761.

### Discussion Questions:

- ① Think about Christian history. Think about all the horrible things done by professed Christians, and often in the name of Jesus too. Think how people have used their faith as cover, a cloak, a justification for some horrific crimes. How does this unfortunate fact help us better understand the need for the kind of separation among the professed followers of Jesus, as revealed in this parable and in other Bible texts?
- ② Ellen G. White makes it clear that Christ’s robe represents the righteousness of Jesus that not only covers, or justifies, us but also changes us into His image and allows us to reflect His character in our lives. How are we to understand the differences between these two essential truths, and why is it important that we do?
- ③ Reflect upon the reality of the great controversy and how much it impacts and influences our theology as Seventh-day Adventists. Go through the Bible and pull together all the texts you can find that show just how biblical and important this theme is.
- ④ Jesus ended the parable of the wedding garment with these words: “For many are called, but few are chosen” (*Matt. 22:14*). What do you think He meant by that statement, given the context of the parable?

# The Balite Tree

by BONY LAGUNDAY

The Manobo people of Togopon village in the southern Philippines wanted to relocate their village. They found a site that had plenty of safe water and enough land for houses and gardens. The site was perfect except for one thing: a balite, or banyan, tree grew nearby, and some villagers believed that the tree was home to spirits. Some said that they heard a baby cry near the tree. Others smelled food cooking when they passed the tree. The witch doctor predicted that a disaster would wipe out the village if they moved to the area where this tree grew.

I am one of two student missionary teachers in this village. Some Seventh-day Adventist members told us about the problem and asked our advice. Should they move the village to the new site or find another location?

We prayed and then told the believers, “Satan is real; he is seeking to deceive people. But God has defeated Satan, who trembles when he hears the weakest child of God pray. We have nothing to fear as long as we trust God to cover us with His care.”

The villagers moved to the new site. Some villagers heard strange sounds coming from the balite tree; others noted that some children had gotten sick. Even I felt something strange.

One day I saw a new student in my classroom, a student I didn’t recognize. The other children didn’t seem to see this new student. After class this new student warned me not to stay in this village or something bad would happen to me. Then, in a blink, the mysterious student disappeared. Later I saw him near the balite tree.

That night I couldn’t sleep. I thought of my late father and my grandmother, both of whom had been witch doctors in the village of my birth. Could the devil’s curse still be on me? Then I reminded myself that I am now God’s child, and God won the victory over Satan before this world was created. I talked to my teammate, and we prayed that God would show the villagers that He truly is God and that they have nothing to fear.

The tree continued to disturb the villagers, so someone suggested that they cut it down. But the people feared that the person who cut the tree down would die. So I took the ax, prayed, then cut down the tree. No harm came to any of the villagers. “The God of the student missionary teachers is a powerful God!” the people declared.

Please pray that the people of Togopon will grow in their faith. And thank you for your mission offerings that help train me and other young Adventists for service in difficult places around the world.

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# More Clothing Imagery



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Mark 5:24–34; Luke 8:43–48; John 13:1–16; 19:23, 24; Matt. 26:59–68; 27:27–29.*

**Memory Text:** “For she said, If I may touch but his clothes, I shall be whole” (*Mark 5:28*).

In one sense, it shouldn't be all that surprising that we can glean so many lessons from clothing in the Bible, should it? After all, clothing is so much a part of us; clothing can say a lot about us and who we are, even when no voice is heard. Rightly or wrongly, we often make judgments about others by what they wear or how they wear it.

This week's lesson will look at the question of clothing, all in the context of Jesus. We'll explore the woman who believed, rightly so, that all she had to do was touch His clothes, and she would be healed. Then there's Jesus, laying aside His garment in order to wash the feet of His disciples. Next we'll look at the high priest who, standing before the Lord, rent his own garments in an act that sealed the haughty ruler's doom. Then there's Jesus in the garments of mockery, put on Him by the Roman soldiers. And finally, we'll look at the soldiers casting lots for Christ's garment, thus fulfilling an ancient prophecy.

Just clothing, yes, yet full of symbolism and meaning, for sure.

\**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 18.*

## “Who Touched My Clothes?”

Mark 5:24–34 and Luke 8:43–48 tell the story of the woman who had “an issue of blood twelve years.” Besides being a dangerous medical condition in and of itself, this sickness in that culture came with the stigma of ritual uncleanness, as well, no doubt adding to her misery. Meanwhile, the doctors could do nothing; she was so desperate that she spent all her money on them, and yet, she became only sicker, which isn’t surprising considering the kind of medical treatments done back then. We barely can imagine how much suffering and shame she endured because of her ailment.

And then comes Jesus, the One who is doing all these incredible miracles.

**Read** Mark 5:24–34 and Luke 8:43–48. What significance can be found in the fact that the woman believed all she had to do was touch Jesus’ garment to find healing?

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This woman had a great deal of faith in Jesus, enough to believe that if she could touch even His clothes, she would be healed. Of course, it wasn’t the clothes themselves that healed her—not even the touch. It was only the power of God working in someone who, out of desperation, came to the Lord in faith, aware of her own helplessness and need. Her touching His clothes was faith revealed in works, which is what Christianity is all about.

**Why** would Jesus ask who touched His garment?

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By asking the question and making the woman’s act and healing public, Jesus used her to help witness to those around Him. He certainly wanted others to know what happened, and He probably wanted her, too, to know that it wasn’t any magical power in His clothes that brought her healing but the power of God working in her through the act of faith on her part. However embarrassing her condition had been, she now was healed and could give witness to what Christ had wrought in her.

**How can we learn to come to the Lord, as did this woman, in faith and submission, aware of our own helplessness? More so, how can we maintain faith and trust in Him when the healing that we ask for doesn’t come as we want it to?**

## He “Laid Aside His Garments”

In the last few days of Christ’s life on earth, He met with His disciples in the upper room for the Passover, Israel’s national celebration of the Exodus from bondage and slavery. Yet, all was not well. The atmosphere in the upper room must have been thick with tension and ill will. Not much earlier, the disciples had been fighting over who would have the highest place in heaven (*Matt. 18:1–5*). Now they had come together to celebrate the Passover, which should have spoken to them of their great need of God’s saving grace in their lives and how dependent they were on Him.

**Read** Matthew 20:20–28. What important lesson had the disciples totally failed to grasp, even after all this time with Jesus?

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As if the disciples’ attitudes hadn’t been bad enough, to top it all off there was Judas, His betrayer, acting as if nothing were wrong. In the midst of all this, when Jesus had every right to be disgusted with the whole lot of them, what does He do?

**Read** John 13:1–16. What lesson is Jesus giving here? Why is this in so many ways key to what it means to be a follower of Jesus?

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It was the custom for the disciples to make provisions for washing the filth of the streets from their feet. This was a servant’s work. But the disciples had no servants. And none of them would stoop to this humiliating and menial task. As Jesus took off His outer garment and began to wash their feet, their hearts melted. They had declared Him to be the Son of God. That God’s Son should stoop to do the work of a slave shamed them. The text said that before doing this, He took off His outer garment, showing His willingness to lower Himself and humble Himself to whatever degree was needed in order to reach His followers.

And then, if all that wasn’t enough, knowing full well what was in Judas’s heart, He washed Judas’s feet, as well.

**How “low” are you willing to go for the good of others? When was the last time you “took off your outer garment” in order to minister to the needs of those around you?**

## “Nor Rend His Clothes”

“And he that is the high priest among his brethren, upon whose head the anointing oil was poured, and that is consecrated to put on the garments, shall not uncover his head, nor rend his clothes” (*Lev. 21:10*).

**Read** Matthew 26:59–68. What can we read into the high priest’s rending of his garments in response to Christ’s answer to him? See also *Mark 15:38, Heb. 8:1*.

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The high priest rent his clothes to symbolize that Jesus was to be put to death. Tearing his garments symbolized Caiaphas’s righteous indignation and signified his horror over Jesus’ allegedly blasphemous claim to be the Son of God. Mosaic law forbade the high priest from tearing his ecclesiastical clothes (*Lev. 10:6, 21:10*), because his garments symbolized the perfection of God’s character. To tear those robes would be to profane God’s character, to mar its perfection. Thus, the irony was that Caiaphas was guilty of breaking the very law he defended. It made him unfit for his office. More sobering than that, the penalty for tearing his garments was death. The great irony in all this was that Jesus, who had done nothing wrong, was to be put to death at the instigation of the very priest who, through his actions, deserved death.

The symbolism of that rending was profound. This was the beginning of the end of the entire earthly sacrificial system and priesthood. A new and better one was soon to be inaugurated, with Christ as the new High Priest ministering in the sanctuary in heaven.

The clothes of the earthly high priest, so full of symbolism and significance in their time, were soon to become symbols of a system that was now devoid of all meaning and about to end. How terrible that the religious leaders were so blinded by hatred, jealousy, and fear that when Christ came—the One to whom their whole religion pointed—many of these leaders (but not all) missed Him, and it was the common people who accepted Jesus as the Messiah and took up the work that these priests should have been doing.

**In what ways could we be so caught up in our own sense of self-righteousness, our own sense of moral and spiritual superiority, that we could be blind to the important truths that the Lord wants us to learn?**

## Garments of Mockery

“Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the common hall, and gathered unto him the whole band of soldiers. And they stripped him, and put on him a scarlet robe. And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand: and they bowed the knee before him, and mocked him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews!” (*Matt. 27:27–29*). Think about what is happening in these verses. What terrible irony do you see? What do these verses tell us about human ignorance, cruelty, and foolishness? How do these verses, in their own dramatic way, symbolize what the world does to its Creator and Redeemer, even today? See also *Luke 23:10, 11; Mark 15:17–20*.

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Jesus was stripped and garbed in a scarlet or purple robe. This robe could have been a soldier’s cloak or one of Pilate’s old cast-off garments. Purple was the color of royalty. This robe was thrown in mockery around the shoulders of the Man who claimed to be King.

Of course, no king is complete without his crown. Jesus’ tormenters fashioned Him one of thorns, from the sharp shrubs growing in the region of Palestine, and placed in His hands a reed in imitation of a royal scepter. They bowed to Him in mockery, hailing Him as King of the Jews. But whereas the priests’ mockery consisted of an attack on Christ’s spiritual authority, the soldiers mocked His political sovereignty. The true King was paraded around in a mock ceremony, wearing mock garments. He who offered to clothe a sinful world in His own garments of righteousness and perfection was now clothed in the garments of mockery.

And yet, the incredible thing is that Jesus endured this, at least in part, because of His love for those who were treating Him this way. How many of us, the moment anyone treats us badly or even looks at us crossly, react with anger and seek to fight back? Look, though, at the example Jesus leaves us here regarding how He responded to this treatment.

**How do you respond when treated unfairly? What can you take from His example that could help you deal differently the next time it happens?**

## “They Parted My Garments”

**“They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture” (Ps. 22:18).**

It’s hard to imagine the humiliation Jesus was to endure. After the mock ceremony of the soldiers, He is brought to the cross and then, there, stripped of the last vestiges of His earthly possessions, the clothes off His back. Beaten, rejected, humiliated, mocked, and now stripped and crucified, Jesus was, indeed, drinking the bitter cup that, from “the foundation of the world” (Rev. 13:8), was to be His.

**Read** John 19:23, 24 (*see also Matt. 27:35*). What prophetic significance does the Bible give to what happened there, and why is it important?

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Here is the greatest act in all cosmic history unfolding right before them, and these soldiers are dealing with something as petty as dividing up the clothes of one of their victims!

And yet, their action itself isn’t so trivial, because the Bible shows that what the soldiers did was a fulfillment of prophecy. John directly links it to the psalm, saying that it happened so that “the scripture might be fulfilled” (Matthew does, as well), thus giving us more evidence for our faith.

Think, too, what this could have meant to Jesus, as well. The weight of the world’s sin falling on Him, the separation from the Father bearing down on Him, Jesus then sees these soldiers, right beneath Him, dividing up His clothing and casting lots, all in a fulfillment of prophecy. This easily could have given Him extra courage to endure what He was facing on the cross. These actions by the soldiers were more evidence that, no matter how terrible His trial, no matter how dreadful the suffering, prophecy was being fulfilled, His earthly ministry was nearing its grand climax, and the provision would be made that would give salvation to any human being who claimed it by faith. Thus, Jesus had to endure, and He did.

**What biblical prophecies have you found the most faith affirming, especially in times of need, especially in times when trials have tested your faith?**

**Further Study:** Read Ellen G. White, “The Touch of Faith,” pp. 59–63, in *The Ministry of Healing*; “The Touch of Faith,” pp. 342, 343, “In Pilate’s Judgment Hall,” pp. 728–731, “Calvary,” p. 746, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“The enemies of Jesus now awaited His death with impatient hope. That event they imagined would forever hush the rumors of His divine power and the wonders of His miracles. They flattered themselves that they should then no longer tremble because of His influence. The unfeeling soldiers who had stretched the body of Jesus on the cross, divided His clothing among themselves, contending over one garment, which was woven without seam. They finally decided the matter by casting lots for it. The pen of inspiration had accurately described this scene hundreds of years before it took place: ‘For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet. . . . They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture.’ Ps. 22:16, 18.”—Ellen G. White, *The Story of Redemption*, pp. 223, 224.

### Discussion Questions:

- ❶ In class go over whatever Bible prophecies each person finds especially encouraging. How do these prophecies reveal to us the fact that God truly has given us very good reasons for belief?
- ❷ Review the last few days of Christ’s life and the incredible humiliation, self-denial, and suffering He had to endure. What lessons can we take from them for ourselves? How can we learn to die to self the way that Jesus has revealed to us here?
- ❸ Think of the utter ignorance of the soldiers who mocked Jesus with the scarlet robe and the crown of thorns. Or the ones who divided up His clothes beneath His feet, totally unaware of what was really happening. Or even that of the high priest, who rent his own garment in supposed righteous indignation at Christ’s answer to him. All of these men acted in sheer ignorance, and yet, all took part in perpetrating a horrible crime. Does this ignorance of what they were doing in any way excuse their actions? Why should they be punished for something they did without knowing exactly what it was? Discuss.

# Faith Full Circle

Maria Villaroel lives on Easter Island, one of the most remote places on earth. This small island, known for its mysterious stone statues, lies more than two thousand miles west of South America.

Maria's husband, Atilio, traveled to Easter Island in 1975, leaving Maria and their infant son behind in Chile. During her husband's absence, Maria was introduced to the Adventist message. She embraced these new truths and was baptized just before she joined her husband on Easter Island.

When Maria arrived, she discovered that she was the only Seventh-day Adventist among the 3,000 people living on the island. Maria worshiped and taught her children Bible stories in her home on Sabbath.

For years she prayed that God would help her to share her faith with others. Then she met Sergio Celada, a Chilean police officer who was visiting the island on business. She wanted to share the gospel with him, but she wasn't sure how. Then she remembered the Voice of Hope tapes that she had just received. She offered them to Sergio. The tapes made a deep impression on Sergio's heart, and he arranged to have the recordings broadcast over the local radio station.

Sergio had to leave Easter Island, but he urged Maria to take the tapes to the radio station every week. Maria did this for more than twenty years. She became the Voice of Hope on Easter Island. People wanted to know more about the Bible, and Maria wrote to the Voice of Hope in Chile and asked for Bible study guides.

Maria prayed for help to raise up a church on the island. In 1998 Gabriel Montoya, an Adventist from Chile, visited the island. Maria begged him to send someone to Easter Island to teach her and others who were interested more about the Bible. Gabriel sent his wife, Luz. Within a month, 30 people were studying the Bible with Luz and Maria.

Luz continues to visit the island whenever she can, studying the Bible with people whom Maria has introduced to the Savior. Maria's dream of a church on Easter Island has come true at last. Each Sabbath, 30 members and many visitors worship together.

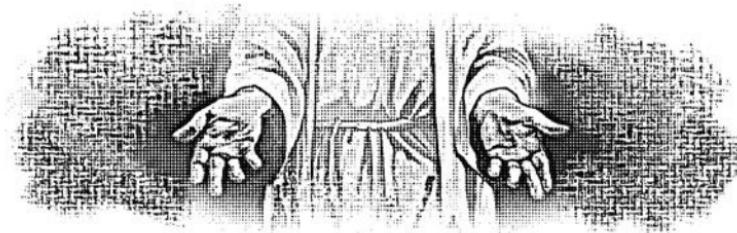
The chain of faith has come full circle. Maria's first interest, Sergio Celada, was baptized in Chile, and her own son is studying theology. He plans to return to Easter Island to pastor the church his mother helped to plant.

Easter Island had no Adventist presence until an untrained believer prayed that God would use her to plant a church. Our mission offerings help make such outreach possible through programs such as Global Mission. Thank you for giving.

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MARIA VILLAROEL is a Global Mission pioneer living on Easter Island.

# Clothed in Christ



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** Gal. 3:26–29, Rom. 6:1–6, Col. 3:1–10, Eph. 4:22–24, 1 Cor. 15:49–55, 2 Cor. 5:1–4.

**Memory Text:** “Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature” (*Romans 13:14, NIV*).

H ave you ever dropped an egg and watched it break into messy pieces? One thing, though, you have *never* seen is the messy pieces of that broken egg dropped again, only to turn back into an egg. Reality just doesn’t work that way.

A fundamental law of our natural world, at least our fallen natural world, is that objects tend toward decay, toward disorder. What do things left alone do—increase in energy, order, and structure, or decrease, decay, and move toward disorder? The answer’s obvious. We see it all around us and even in ourselves (for instance, our aging bodies).

A lot of complicated science goes into explaining this phenomenon, but you don’t need a PhD in physics to see it. To quote a text from an earlier lesson, “And the earth shall wax old like a garment” (*Isa. 51:6*).

And yet, amid all this, we have the gospel, the plan of salvation, which at its core is about restoration, about taking the old, the broken, and the decaying and making it new.

This final week we’ll look at some special clothing imagery from the Scriptures that reveals these promises of renewal and restoration.

\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 25.

## Heirs According to the Promise

One of the great struggles of the Christian church from the earliest days, a struggle that was at the heart of the Protestant Reformation (and one that in various ways continues today, even in our church), deals with the question of the gospel, of salvation, of how we are saved. Paul, with the church in Galatia, had to deal squarely and directly with the issue, where false theology had crept in and threatened the integrity of the gospel itself.

**Read** Galatians 3:26–29. What is the main point that Paul is making? (As you read, note that the Greek word translated “put on” comes from the word meaning “to be clothed.”)

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In verse 27, Paul says that all those who were baptized “have clothed yourselves with Christ” (*NIV*). Though all were sinners, their sins had been washed away, their old filthy garments were gone, and they were now “clothed,” covered in the righteousness of Jesus. His life, His perfection, and His character, they can now claim as their own. All the covenant promises have been fulfilled in Jesus, and now, clothed in Christ, they can claim those promises for themselves. They are heirs of the promise first made to Abraham (*Gen. 12:2, 3*), not because of status, gender, or nationality but only through faith in Christ.

**Read** Romans 6:1–6. What is Paul saying that should help us understand what it means to be “clothed” in Christ?

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Being clothed in Christ is more than just a legal standing with God. Christians are united with Christ; they are surrendered to Him; and through Him they are being renewed, rejuvenated, and restored. Christians who refuse to change their old ways, their old habits, and their old lifestyle need to look in the mirror at what they are really clothed in.

**What are you wearing? Is what you wear in public different from what you wear when no one (you think) is watching? What does your answer tell you about yourself?**

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## No Provision for the Flesh

For all of Paul's deep and complicated theology, he also can be very practical. Any theology, any version of the "gospel" that focuses solely on salvation in cold and legal terms alone misses the point. Christianity is all about Jesus, but it's not about Jesus in isolation. It's about Jesus and what He has done for our fallen race through His life, death, and High Priestly ministry. It's not just about a change in our legal status before God; it's about a change, a renewal, a new birth in us; it's about a new life in Christ.

**Read** Romans 13. Focus on the daily, practical points that Paul is dealing with here for those who are Christians.

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Most of the chapter deals with, in many ways, what could be considered being a good citizen and a good neighbor. It's a reiteration of the principles of the law, culminating in the famous words, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (vs. 9).

In verses 11–14, however, the tone somewhat shifts. Paul begins the chapter by talking about obeying the present political powers, and then he shifts to an emphasis on the "lateness" of the time, the idea being that considering the times the Romans were living in, they needed to get serious about their conduct. At the end of the chapter, we have the phrase "clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ" (vs. 14, NIV), which uses the same Greek root found in Galatians 3:27. Thus, both verses are saying similar things.

The context here in Romans 13 makes it clear what Paul basically means. The verses that come before and the rest of the verse following the phrase itself show that being clothed in Christ means living a life of faith and obedience. The same Greek root for "clothed" appears in verse 12, as well, in the context of donning the "armour of light." Christ is the light of the world; those who walk in Him don't walk in darkness. They have "cast off the works of darkness" and now walk in light. Whatever else to "be clothed" in Christ means, it certainly deals with character building, with conduct, with loving as Christ loved, and with reflecting His image. In a sense, while all things around us tend to get worse, those clothed in Christ should be getting better and better (*see 2 Cor. 3:18*).

**How different would your life be were you fully clothed in Christ? That is, what parts of your life have you held back from the kind of surrender and death to self needed in order for the Lord to work in you? How would your life differ were you to make that complete surrender?**

## Putting Off, Putting On

**Read** Colossians 3:1–10. Keep in mind that, in verse 10, the verb *to put on* is from the same verb *to be clothed* that appeared in the previous verses we have studied. With that in mind, what are these verses saying to us?

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Scholars see in these verses, as in some of the other ones we've looked at, references to the idea of baptism. (Where in the texts do you see a hint of that?) In no uncertain terms, we are shown again the idea of renewal, of regeneration, of something made better than it was before. In Christ we are no longer the same people we once were, living as we once did. Here, too, Paul is very clear in linking what we experience of Christ now with what we will experience when He returns. Indeed, how we respond to Christ's first coming will decide what happens to us at His second coming!

**Read** Ephesians 4:22–24 (yes, the Greek verb in verse 24 is *to clothe*). What point is Paul stressing here, as well?

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Notice the contrast between the “old man” and the “new man.” In principle, the old man, the former self, has died (symbolized by baptism), and a new man, a new creation in Christ, results. Here, too, the idea of being “clothed,” either in Christ or in the new man, arises in the context of Christian behavior. Read the verses that come before and after. We are dealing with a transformation of character, of actions, of a person’s whole moral being. This motif, this idea, keeps recurring. As baptized Christians, we are new people in the Lord; to be clothed in Christ isn’t a metaphor just for justification, for Christ’s righteousness covering our sins and giving us a new legal standing before God. Being clothed in Christ means being a new person, one “created in righteousness and true holiness” (*Eph. 4:24*).

Go back over the verses for today, looking at specific commands regarding behavior. In what areas do you need change? If you are struggling, why not seek out someone you can trust and ask for help in how you can better live out the principles taught in Scripture?

## In the Twinkling of an Eye

No question, to be clothed in Christ is to become a new person in Jesus. It is to be restored, at least somewhat, into “the image of the One who created him” (*Col. 3:10, NASB*). Untold numbers of lives have borne and still today bear testimony to the reality of what the Lord has done in and for them. Many of our own lives, regardless of our faults, struggles, and falls, witness to the reality of what it means to be clothed in Jesus.

Yet, let’s be honest. If what Christ did for us ended with this life here, in the end—whether we are clothed in Christ or not clothed in Christ—the grave would still await us. Many have suffered a great deal in this life for Jesus and for their faith. Whatever the immediate rewards, what are these rewards, what *could* they be, in contrast to the real reward awaiting us at the Second Coming?

**Read** 1 Corinthians 15:49–55. What great hope is presented here? As you read the text, guess which words come from the same Greek root we’ve seen all week, “to clothe” or “to be clothed.”

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In verses 53 and 54, the verb (often translated “clothed”) is the same one we’ve already seen. Here, though, the apostle takes it to a whole new level. Being clothed in Christ doesn’t mean only to bear the moral image of Jesus, to reflect His character, and to live out the principles that He taught us. In other words, it’s not just a legal change, not just a moral change: it also will include a radical *physical* change. Our mortal flesh, our aching and hurting and dying flesh, will be clothed with the same kind of immortal body that the resurrected Jesus had. Talk about a change of clothing, talk about wearing a new garment! That’s the ultimate hope that awaits us, the only hope that really makes our faith worthwhile (*see 1 Cor. 15:12–19*).

**Most of us (particularly as we age) realize the frailty and untrustworthiness of our flesh. If we don’t yet see that frailty in ourselves, we can see it in others. Think about the hope we have in Jesus, as revealed in these verses. What could this world, in any conceivable manner, offer that would make it worth losing the promise revealed here?**

## Our Heavenly Dwelling

**Read** 2 Corinthians 5:1–4. What is Paul telling us here? What hope is again presented? How does clothing imagery fit in?

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As long as we are in this world, in this body, in this “house,” we are going to “groan” (from a word that means also “to sigh deeply”). Who hasn’t groaned while in our “earthly dwelling,” which is our present body? Look at the chapter that comes before (*1 Corinthians 4*), talking of the woe that followers of Jesus have encountered in this existence. It’s after this recitation that Paul goes into the verses for today.

Sure, we groan, we suffer, and we die, but that’s not the whole story. We have the promise of being clothed in “our heavenly dwelling.”

**What** two metaphors, or images, does Paul use in these verses to depict our present situation and the hope that awaits us?

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In some ancient writings, the idea of being clothed was seen as similar to being inside a house. Both are external to us, and both present a certain amount of protection and covering (in Paul’s time, the name of the garment worn by the poorer class came from a word that meant “little house”). Whatever the reasons, Paul uses different images to contrast two basic ideas—a temporal earthly dwelling in contrast to an eternal heavenly one; being naked in contrast to being clothed; and mortality (the certainty of death) in contrast to life, eternal life in Christ. In the end, these metaphors all are talking about the same thing: the hope that we have, at Christ’s return, of being clothed or housed in immortal bodies. In other words, these verses (2 Corinthians 5:1–4) are another way of expressing the promise of eternal life that we have in Jesus.

**Think about death, about the apparent finality of it. Without hope of something beyond it, what hope is there for any of us? Dwell on all the reasons that we have for our hope that death doesn’t have the final say. Bring your answers to class and discuss them there.**

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**Further Study:** “The Controversy Ended,” p. 665, in *The Great Controversy*.

“All will be a happy, united family, clothed with the garments of praise and thanksgiving—the robe of Christ’s righteousness. All nature in its surpassing loveliness will offer to God a constant tribute of praise and adoration. The world will be bathed in the light of heaven. The years will move on in gladness. The light of the moon will be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun will be seven-fold greater than it is now. Over the scene the morning stars will sing together, and the sons of God will shout for joy, while God and Christ will unite in proclaiming, ‘There shall be no more sin, neither shall there be any more death.’”—Ellen G. White, *My Life Today*, p. 348.

**Discussion Questions:**

- 1** As a class, go over your answers to Thursday’s final question. How can you help each other find hope in this wonderful promise? How can you help those who might find themselves struggling with doubt?
- 2** So often, in our day and age, people have placed so much hope in science. Many have seen science as the only way of coming to know truth and as the only hope of humankind. Dwell on why that’s such a false hope, especially in the context of the last few days’ lessons. What hope can science offer us for the greatest problem we face—death? Why must our hope be in something “supernatural,” as depicted in those promises?
- 3** Think about Paul’s question in Romans 7:24, “Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (a reference to a punishment of the time, when a criminal had to wear a dead body chained to his body). What answer do we have that all the world’s wisdom cannot supply?
- 4** Dwell more on what it means to be “clothed” in Christ in terms of how we are to live. Think through how you are living—your practices, your habits, your thoughts, your attitudes toward others, and so forth. How well do you reflect the reality of Christ in these areas? Though we all struggle with cultivated and inherited tendencies toward sin, what overt and conscious choices can you make that would go a long way in helping you live as you know you should? Also, how can we help each other, as a community, in living out the biblical ideals presented before us?

# A Passion for Souls

Razzak stopped at the door of the Christian church in Kolkota (Calcutta), India. Ever since he was a child he had wondered about Jesus. The door was open, and being curious, he walked inside.

The pastor greeted him and told him more about Jesus and introduced him to the plan of salvation. Razzak left the church feeling a sense of peace; somehow he knew that the Christians' God was real.

He found a Christian church closer to his home and began attending services every day. Within a few months he was baptized. Razzak started preaching and led many people to Christ. But when his infant nephew died, the child's parents were refused burial space in the community cemetery because Razzak was a Christian.

Razzak wept to God about this problem. When people from another village learned that the religious leaders had refused to bury the child, they offered to bury him in their cemetery. Razzak praised God for solving the family's dilemma. During the funeral, Razzak read from the Bible and preached to the people. Later Razzak asked God to send him as a missionary to the very people who had refused to bury his nephew.

He studied for a year to prepare himself to preach to these people. Then he worked with another man who had more experience leading these people to Christ, and together they led some one thousand families to Christ in less than ten years.

One day at the railway station Razzak met a man who introduced himself as a Seventh-day Adventist. "I, too, am a Christian," the man said. "And I want you to know what we believe." The man, Solomon, began explaining what Adventists believe and showed Razzak Bible texts to back it up.

Razzak listened as Solomon explained the Sabbath truth to him. He was convinced and began studying his own Bible more carefully. Within a few months, he was baptized. Razzak quit his work with the Protestant pastor and became a lay evangelist in the heart of Kolkota, one of the largest cities in the world.

In less than three years, God blessed him with more than seventy converts in an area where it takes great effort to lead a person to Christ. He worships with the new believers in one of four house churches because the believers have no church home.

In India people believe that if a religious organization can't provide a house of worship, they're not serious about their faith.

Your mission offerings help support outreach such as Razzak's in India. And part of a recent Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help build at least one church in Kolkota, India. Thank you.

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RAZZAK KHAN shares his faith in the suburbs of Kolkota, India.

As Seventh-day Adventists, we often cite the message in Revelation 14:6, 7, in terms of last-day events, but these verses also can help us to understand what true worship is. The third quarter guide on *Worship*, by Rosalie Zinke, will delve into this topic. Foundational to all of our worship should be the death of Jesus on our behalf and our response to it, which includes not only going to the Cross but going to Christ, our High Priest, in the heavenly sanctuary.

Worship should be permeated by a sense of reverence and awe for our God to give us the humility and surrender needed for true worship. Our worship must be about Him, and about giving glory to Him. As we worship, we need to do so with a sense of accountability to God for what we do and with a realization that we can hide nothing from Him. This fact should drive us to the Cross, our only hope in judgment.

Finally, we are told to worship the Creator. Creation is foundational to all worship, because all that we believe is based on the fact that God is the Creator. We worship Him because He is the Creator, the Redeemer, and the Judge. Creation, Redemption, and judgment all are closely tied, and all true worship needs to be firmly rooted in these objective theological truths. These truths are central to what worship should be about. It is our hope that this upcoming quarter study will teach each of us what it means to truly worship the only One in all creation who, by virtue of who He is, is worthy of all our worship.

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## Lesson 1—Worship in Genesis: Two Classes of Worshipers

### The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: Worship in Eden (*Gen. 2:1–3*)

MONDAY: Worship Outside of Eden (*Gen. 3:15*)

TUESDAY: Two Lines of Worshipers (*Gen. 6:1–8*)

WEDNESDAY: The Faith of Abraham (*Gen. 12:1–8*)

THURSDAY: Bethel, the House of God (*Gen. 28:10–22*)

### Memory Text—*Genesis 28:16, 17, NKJV*

**Sabbath Gem:** In the story of Cain and Abel, we find the motif of true and false worship, which appears throughout the Bible. The acceptable form of worship is based on salvation by faith and focuses on God's power, glory, and grace, while the unacceptable form is based on works and focuses on humanity and self.

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## Lesson 2—Worship and the Exodus: Understanding Who God Is

### The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: Holy Ground (*Exod. 3:1–15*)

MONDAY: The Death of the Firstborn: Passover and Worship  
(*Exod. 12:1–36*)

TUESDAY: No Other Gods (*Exod. 20:1–6*)

WEDNESDAY: “These Be Your Gods . . .” (*Exod. 32:1–6*)

THURSDAY: “Show Me Your Glory” (*Exod. 33:12–23*)

### Memory Text—*Exodus 20:2, 3, NKJV*

**Sabbath Gem:** Early accounts of the children of Israel and their encounters with the Lord reveal to us the nature and character of the God we profess to serve and worship.

**Lessons for the Visually Impaired** The regular Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide is available free each month in braille and on audiocassette to sight-impaired and physically handicapped persons who cannot read normal ink print. This includes individuals who, because of arthritis, multiple sclerosis, paralysis, accident, and so forth, cannot hold or focus on normal ink-print publications. Contact Christian Record Services, Box 6097, Lincoln, NE 68506-0097.