

# ***Garments of Grace: Clothing Imagery in the Bible***

## ***Elijah's and Elisha's Mantle***

Lesson #6 for May 7, 2011

Scriptures: 1 Kings 19:1-19; 2 Samuel 10:3,4; Ezekiel 16:15,16; 1 Kings 21:21-29; 2 Kings 2:1-18.

1. There are probably two reasons why the stories of Elijah [which means “*Yahweh* is my God”] and Elisha [which means “God is salvation”] stand out in the Bible. The first is an interesting one. There are four times in biblical history when a large number of miracles took place: 1) At creation, 2) At the exodus, 3) During the days of Elijah and Elisha, and 4) During the days of Jesus and the apostles. Why at those times? Why do you suppose there have been so few miracles outside of those times? With the exception of the days of creation which were obviously an unusual situation, were those times of great faith? Perhaps even subconsciously, we often seem to suggest that if God were more active in human history—that is, if there were more real miracles—there would be more faith. One television evangelist said that if he could demonstrate a resurrection from the dead on live television, he would be able to finish the gospel! But, in the Bible we see that God worked more miracles in times when there was very little faith! Why is that? But, what if there would be a “translation” or “rapture”? What would result from that?
2. There is a second factor which draws the attention of careful Bible students to the character of Elijah. It is the prophecy at the end of Malachi 4. Read the whole chapter. Even today, in Judaism almost certainly because of the implications of this verse, Elijah is associated with the hopes for the coming of the Messiah. At Passover celebration, a special cup of wine is filled and put on the Passover table. During the Passover ceremony, the door of the house is opened and everyone stands in order to allow Elijah the prophet to enter and drink. When circumcisions are performed, a chair, “the chair of Elijah,” is set aside as part of the ceremony.
3. 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.” ([www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/biography/Elijah.htm](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/biography/Elijah.htm)) Surely, the disciples were aware of all of this when they suggested to Jesus in Matthew 16:14 that some people at least hoped that Jesus was the Elijah to come.
4. This lesson will focus on the mantle that belonged to Elijah. That type of mantle tended to be worn by the rich and powerful in the times of the Old Testament. The story of Elijah grabs our attention because he suddenly appeared from an obscure village somewhere east of the Jordan River, walked directly into the throne room of Ahab the king of Israel, announced that God had sent him and that there would be no rain until he said so, and then just as suddenly disappeared. It could not have been very long before the entire nation was looking for him! The name of Elijah must have been on the lips of almost everyone.
5. After three-and-a-half years of drought, there was the experience at Mount Caramel. Imagine the drama of standing by yourself and resoundingly defeating the 850 paid prophets of the queen before the eyes of the whole nation. At the end of that day, he killed all of Jezebel's prophets! (1 Kings 18:40) But, we know that this mountaintop experience was followed by a deep low after his life was threatened by Jezebel. Are there any other biblical characters that openly prayed to God to let them die? (1 Kings 19:4)
6. After being nourished by supernatural food and water, (1 Kings 19:6) he was able to walk

for 40 days to reach Mount Horeb which is an alternate name for Mount Sinai. Did God intend for him to make that journey? Why the supernatural food? A strong walker should have been able to cover that distance (200 miles) in only about two weeks! What was Elijah doing for 40 days? Was Elijah thinking of the 40 years that the children of Israel spent there?

7. After Elijah found a cave on the side of Mount Sinai, he was approached by God with a pointed question! "Elijah, what are you doing here?" (1 Kings 19:9,13, *GNB*)
8. After asking this question the first time, God invited Elijah to stand outside the cave somewhere near the mountaintop. Try to imagine yourself standing beside Elijah when the wind came up that was so strong that it was tearing the rocks out of the mountain! Then, there was an earthquake! The earthquake was followed by fire. Did the fire remind Elijah of Mount Carmel? But, God was not visibly or audibly present in any of these manifestations. What followed was God's voice described as, the "sound of sheer silence"! (1 Kings 19:12, *NRSV*) (Compare Psalms 46:10; Zechariah 4:6)
9. Why would God send wind, earthquake, and fire if He did not intend to communicate through them to Elijah? Was it just for contrast? Do you think Elijah expected to hear from God in the wind, earthquake, and fire? What kind of God chooses rather to speak in a quiet, subdued voice? How many of us would be more impressed by the wind, earthquake, and fire? Are we prepared to listen if God chooses to speak in a quiet, little voice? Is that a voice of reason and logic rather than emotion? Does God speak to us like that in our day? If God began performing a lot of miracles in our day, who do you think would immediately do the same? Would we be able to tell if a given miracle was performed by God or by the Devil?
10. What does the Bible teach us about robes and mantles? Look at some times when famous biblical characters tore their robes because of grief, horror, or even fear: Jacob after hearing of Joseph's supposed death (Genesis 37:34); David, after Joab killed Abner, inviting the nation to celebrate the life of Abner (2 Samuel 3:31); even the king of Israel in Samaria as it was under siege (2 Kings 6:30); Caiaphas after Jesus' confession (Matthew 26:65).
11. Let us turn now to talk about Elijah's mantle. A mantle is an outer garment, something like a coat or poncho, often worn by important or rich people. We first hear about this mantle when Elijah covered his face in respect and reverence as God spoke to him on Mount Sinai. (1 Kings 19:13) Why did he do that? Apparently, he did not respond in any way to the wind, earthquake, or fire! We next hear about this mantle a short time later when, following God's instructions, he threw the mantle over Elisha as Elisha was plowing in his father's fields. Even today, we use the expression, "passing the mantle." Perhaps Elisha remembered the story in Numbers 20:28 when Moses under God's direction removed the priestly robes from Aaron and placed them on Eleazar just before Aaron's death on Mount Hor. In any case, apparently Elisha clearly understood that the placing of this mantle onto his shoulders was his call to serve as the prophet's assistant.
12. By contrast, it is interesting to note that mantles and robes are sometimes mentioned in Scripture under very different circumstances. Read Job 1:20; Psalm 109:29; Jude 22,23; 2 Samuel 10:3,4; Ezekiel 16:15,16. In these verses we notice that garments were torn or used to represent sin, shame, or disaster. But, in the case of Elisha, the meaning was quite different.

As Elijah, divinely directed in seeking a successor, passed the field in which Elisha was plowing, he cast upon the [220] 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*, pages 219, 220.

13. Thus, we see that clothing can be torn or used in times of great emotion to indicate devotion, commitment, and dedication and also on occasions of sin, shame, or disaster. (See Ezekiel 16 & 23)
14. What does clothing usually mean in our society today? Ever since the days of Adam and Eve, clothing has been used to cover our nakedness. But, as we all know, at least in Western society in our day, the way one dresses is always a fashion statement about himself/herself even when he/she is just dressing very casually.
15. None of us—except perhaps under very unusual circumstances—would wear a mantle in our day. A mantle is something like a coat or a cape and was normally worn by a military leader, someone of temporal authority, even a royal personage, or someone with religious importance such as a priest or prophet.
16. Ahab and his son who followed him were the main opponents of Elijah and Elisha. After Jezebel committed murder by scheming the death of Naboth which allowed Ahab to claim Naboth's vineyard, Ahab was met in that vineyard by Elijah. (1 Kings 21:18-20) Elijah prophesied to him about the end of his family line, how they would all die, and why these events would happen! Do you think Ahab's repentance was genuine when he tore his robes, put on sackcloth, and even refused to eat for a period of time? (1 Kings 21:21-29) If so, how long did it last?
17. In the New Testament, there is a story which is somewhat similar. After starting the church in Corinth and working there for about a year and a half, Paul left to return home. On his third missionary journey, he spent approximately 3 years in Ephesus. Word came to Paul that things had deteriorated in Corinth. As a result he wrote 1 Corinthians. That incredible letter which is so impressive to us apparently had little or no impact on them! As a result, Paul apparently took a ship across the sea from Ephesus to Corinth. But, when he appeared there, they treated him very badly! After only a short time, Paul returned to Ephesus wondering what he should do. (2 Corinthians 2:1-4) After thinking it over and certainly after much prayer, he sat down and wrote a very strong letter to them which is probably what we have preserved as 2 Corinthians 10-13.
18. That letter produced the desired effect. But, the response was slow in coming, and Paul became so worried that he started to walk the 600 miles around the coastline to Corinth to see the results. Fortunately, in Philippi he was met by Titus and assured that the letter had worked. Paul remained in Philippi for a short time; but, while there, he wrote 2 Corinthians 1-7 to his friends in Corinth.
19. Have you ever thought that God was attacking you personally? Have you ever received a very strong message from Him? How did you respond?
20. Returning to the story of Elijah and Elisha, read 2 Kings 2:1-18. Elijah's work was finished. But, instead of dying a slow, lingering death, he visited the three schools of the prophets. Then, with Elisha at his side, he struck the waters of the Jordan River with his mantle and the two of them crossed over on dry ground. Somehow, people at some of the schools of the prophets found out that Elijah was to be "taken" by God that day. (2 Kings 2:3,5) How did all of those people know that? Once on the other side and still within visible distance of 50 students from the schools of the prophets, Elijah was swept up in a blaze of glory while his

famous mantle fell to the earth and was picked up by Elisha. Earlier, responding to Elijah's inquiry, Elisha asked to be given as an inheritance from Elijah the portion a firstborn son or successor might receive—a double portion. From that double portion, he was expected to care for the parents. Compare Zelophehad and his daughters. (Numbers 27:1-11)

21. No doubt feeling the tremendous loss and also the tremendous responsibilities that had rolled onto his back, Elisha tore his own garments into two pieces and then put on Elijah's mantle. He returned to the Jordan and, once again, struck the waters with the mantle, crossed on the dry ground—reminding us of the time when the children of Israel had crossed that same river near the same location as they entered the land of Palestine hundreds of years earlier. (Joshua 3)
22. What does this story tell us about the nearness of the heavenly kingdom to every one of us? Why do you suppose that Enoch and Elijah were translated and none of the other biblical heroes were translated? Were Enoch and Elijah more honored than Moses who died before being resurrected and taken to heaven or Elisha who died a lingering death?
23. The translation of Elijah resulted in a major change in the life of Elisha. Leading the Lord's work in the kingdom of Israel was now his job. The lives of both Elijah and Elisha were "book-ended" by remarkable events. Look at the effect of Elisha's bones many years later. (2 Kings 13:21)
24. Have you ever been called by the Lord to take up a major new responsibility? How did you know it was God calling you? How did you respond?
25. Read 2 Kings 2:15-18. Why did the sons of the prophets think it was necessary for them to spend at least three days looking all over the country for Elijah? Did they really think that God might have put him down somewhere else in the country? Has God ever done that? (See Acts 8:26-40, especially Acts 8:39,40)
26. Having reviewed the life of Elijah, why do you suppose God chose him as the forerunner of the Messiah as noted in Malachi 4? Considering what kind of kingdom the Jews were looking forward to in the days of Jesus, would they have welcomed another Elijah? How did they respond to John the Baptist? How would we respond to a modern-day Elijah? How would the world of our time respond to a modern-day Elijah? Read Malachi 4:4. Is each of us as a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the last days called to be a modern-day Elijah?
27. Why doesn't God help us to choose new church leaders in our day using the Elijah-Elisha model? If we had some direct evidence from God as to whom He wished to be the next General Conference president, would we feel more comfortable with the choice? If things did not go well, would we blame God? Or, does God want us to use more democratic methods in our day so that we take more responsibility for the outcome? Do you ever wish that you could live in the days of Elijah or Elisha so that you could see those mighty acts of God? Are you looking forward to talking to those prophets when you reach heaven? How much of the story do we not know? Do you suppose that there are some very interesting and surprising details that we know nothing about?

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