

Garments of Grace: Clothing Imagery in the Bible

Garments of Splendor

Lesson #8 for May 21, 2011

Scriptures: Isaiah 1-5; 6:1-8; 51:6-8; 61; Luke 4:16-20.

1. This lesson is primarily about Isaiah. He began his ministry about 740 B.C. and continued until about 680 B.C. in the early days of King Manasseh. Scholars tell us that his writings are divided into three sections: Isaiah 1-39; then, Isaiah 40-55; and finally, Isaiah 56-66. Some scholars believe that each of these sections was written by a different author, but those arguments are not very convincing. Isaiah was writing to the people in his day, but also he was writing for people down through the ages to our time.
2. Most of our lessons for this series so far have focused on actual clothing or, in some cases, the lack thereof, here on this earth. Beginning with this lesson, we will focus more on virtual types of clothing representing ideas and metaphors. Garments of splendor, garments of salvation, and robes of righteousness are some examples in this lesson.
3. Isaiah lived during a very tempestuous time. The northern kingdom of Israel with its border located just a few miles from Jerusalem where Isaiah lived was conquered and destroyed by the nation of Assyria in 723/722 B.C. During the times of Hezekiah, Judah itself was completely overrun. The only city left standing was Jerusalem, and it was under siege. God rescued Jerusalem by destroying 185,000 Assyrian soldiers who surrounded the city. (2 Kings 19:35; Isaiah 37:36) But, why were those things happening to the children of Israel? Why did God place the Israelites in Palestine in the first place. By Isaiah's day, they had become terrible witnesses for God's cause.
4. Read Isaiah 1:1-15 in a modern version. See especially *The Message* or the *Good News Bible*. Does God ever get tired of our offerings? If you were a brand-new prophet arriving in Jerusalem at a very difficult time, would these words make people want to listen to you?
5. While God had some serious things to say to them about their condition, clearly, they felt very differently about themselves! Read Isaiah 3:18-23. What does this kind of dress suggest to you?
6. God told Isaiah that He had done just about everything that He could do to prepare things for the benefit of the children of Israel. But, it is pretty clear from skimming over Isaiah 1-5 that the rich were becoming richer by oppressing the poor, the widows, and the orphans. Justice was being perverted. Judges were accepting bribes, and God was disgusted with the whole thing. Were these the typical sins in Sodom and Gomorrah?
7. Read Matthew 25:31-46. What do these verses compared with Isaiah 1-5 tell us about righteousness? And what is the relationship between this kind of righteous behavior and worshiping God? Look at Isaiah 1:18 and 2:2,3. God wants us to come to Him to learn of Him.
8. In our world things are somewhat different. We would be taken to court for openly abusing orphans or widows or cheating the poor. Does that mean that we never engage in such sins today? Or, do we have other ways of accomplishing the same result?
9. Are you a better person because you worship God? Does it change you when you attend Sabbath school, or Sunday school, or go to church? In what way? *Worship* means that we see worth in God. We will be studying more about worship in our next quarter's lessons.

10. Isaiah must have been aware of much of the fancy clothing that women were wearing in his day. He clearly described it in some detail. But, he also clearly recognized the very transient nature of all earthly garments. Even the most expensive clothing can be ruined almost in an instant! By contrast, the spiritual garments that God asks us to put on will last forever. Do we wear the righteousness of Christ home with us from church?
11. How would you contrast the securities that this world talks about—such as retirement funds, bank accounts, beautiful homes, etc.—with the securities and joy which are offered by God?
12. Everyone recognizes the fact that weddings are occasions for special clothing. Why is that? Why do we go to so much work and so much expense dressing for such special occasions? How often do brides' dresses get worn only once? Isn't that an incredible waste? Often, bridegrooms rent their clothing, and they also wear it only once.
13. Through Isaiah, God challenges us to put on His robe of righteousness. How do we actually do that?
14. In the midst of a nation that was crumbling around him, Isaiah, a member of the royal family of Judah, was apparently worshiping at the temple when God appeared to him in a vision. (Isaiah 6:1-8) Try to imagine what it would have been like for Isaiah. There was an earthquake. The temple shook. Isaiah probably thought he would die. Then, he saw the temple curtains opened, and he viewed God in the most holy place of the sanctuary. All Isaiah could say was:

“There is no hope for me! I am doomed because every word that passes my lips is sinful, and I live among a people whose every word is sinful. And yet, with my own eyes, I have seen the King, the LORD Almighty!” (Isaiah 6:5, GNB)

Imagine talking to God like that! Is this a contradiction to God's statement to Moses that no one could see Him and live? (Exodus 33:20) Almost certainly, Isaiah was seeing God only in vision. No one else saw God literally filling the temple. Remember that Isaiah was apparently seeing through two curtains and into the most holy place. But, that is not all. He was able to see God! Clearly, this was a vision. Many prophets have seen God in vision.

15. Isaiah specifically called himself a man of unclean lips dwelling in the midst of a nation with unclean lips. What does that mean? Is this a metaphor for lying? Foul language?
16. It is interesting to notice that Isaiah was one of a handful of prophets who described visions of God and also visions of Lucifer/Satan. (Isaiah 6:1-8; 14:12-15) Who were the others? Why were those prophets given such visions? (Ezekiel 1, 10, 28; Job 1, 2, 37-42; Zechariah 3:1-5)
17. Isaiah believed that he was totally unfit for the experience which he had just had. But, then an angel came to him and brought a coal from the altar and touched his lips. Following that experience, Isaiah's response was, “Here am I; send me.” (Isaiah 6:8)
18. Could you describe in ordinary language what it means to wear garments of splendor or garments of salvation? What about robes of righteousness? Few of us would question the fact that such robes—if we could put them on—would last forever. Why did Isaiah compare these robes of righteousness to wedding garments? (See also Revelation 22)
19. In Isaiah's day, they had only natural fibers from which to make clothing. Under those circumstances, it was common for insects to get into stored clothing and to eat holes in it. Such clothing often became useless. By contrast, God described His deliverance as lasting

forever. (Isaiah 51:6-8)

20. After reading some particularly horrendous story in the newspaper, do you sometimes agree with Isaiah that “the earth will wear out like old clothing, and all its people die like flies.” (Isaiah 51:6, GNB) Clearly, everything on this earth is temporary. About 230,000 people died from the tsunami when it hit Indonesia and nearby countries in 2004.
21. As Christians, we are fully aware that there are only two exit options open to us. We can be consumed in nuclear flames, or we can live forever on the new earth recreated to be like the Garden of Eden. Why do so many choose the wrong option?
22. Following his vision of God in the temple, Isaiah began a ministry which lasted about 60 years. He prophesied during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. Apparently, his life came to a fairly abrupt end early in the reign of Manasseh who was the most wicked king that Judah ever had. (2 Kings 21:16; Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, page 382; Hebrews 11:37; The Martyrdom of Isaiah; http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ascension_of_Isaiah) Isaiah was stuffed into a hollow log and sawed in two.
23. So, in light of all of these messages, what would God say about us today? What message would He send to your church? What message would we be ready to receive?
24. No doubt, Isaiah remembered vividly that vision for the rest of his life. How do you think he described it to his children? Did he try to describe God to them? What did he tell others about that vision?
25. Modern critics have often spoken disparagingly about the Old Testament. They speak of the fearsome God of the Old Testament in contrast with the loving Jesus of the New Testament. But, in Isaiah we see both pictures presented very clearly. In connection with virtually every warning of gloom and doom, there was some promise of a glorious outcome for those who faithfully served God. Was that a carrot and stick approach to His people?
26. Read Isaiah 52. How many of us—or especially of the Jews—would be delighted to have our enemies serve us, to have all the wealth of the nations flowing to us, etc.? But, this picture is followed almost immediately in Isaiah by a section often described as “The Suffering Servant.” Is there a logical connection between those two sections? Many Christians are not aware that to the Jewish people, Isaiah 53 is a description of the sufferings of the Jewish people. Christians, of course, believe it is a prophecy about the life of Jesus Christ.
27. Read Isaiah 52:3. Have we sold ourselves for nothing? In what sense has God offered to buy us back for nothing?
28. Are there some similarities between the vision of splendor given to Isaiah in Isaiah 6:1-8 and God’s speech to Job in Job 38-41? Recall that in Job 42, God said twice that Job had said of God what was true.
29. Read Isaiah 53:4-6. These verses are claimed by Christians as perhaps the single clearest suggestion that Jesus died a substitutionary death. What is implied by these words? Why does Isaiah 53:4 (GNB) say, “All the while we *thought* that his suffering was punishment sent by God.” Was His punishment sent by God? Is that what is implied by a substitutionary atonement? Or, did Jesus die as the natural consequence of sin? Is sin, in fact, deadly? (Genesis 2:17; Romans 6:23) Did God treat His Son as if He were a sinner?
30. After growing up in Nazareth, Jesus went away for a period of time to be baptized, to experience the 40 days of temptation in the wilderness, and then to begin His ministry in the territory of Judea. After being gone for some time, He returned home. Rumors about

His miracles, etc., had reached Nazareth. He was asked to present a message in the synagogue on Sabbath. What happened is recorded in Luke 4:16-20 (GNB). He first quoted Isaiah 61:1-2 and then sat down and said, "This passage of scripture has come true today, as you heard it being read." What was He trying to say to His family and friends in Nazareth? Jesus was claiming to be the Messiah! He did not quote their favorite part of this passage—"He has sent me to proclaim That the time has come When the LORD will save his people And defeat their enemies." (Isaiah 61:2, GNB)

31. Read all of Isaiah 61. Once again, Isaiah suggested that if they would do what was right, eventually, they would receive all the wealth of the Gentiles. Is that the greatest or best motive for doing what is right?
32. Why didn't Jesus come as a king or a military leader? They all would have followed Him. Why do you think Jesus lived the simple, apparently unassuming, life of an ordinary Galilean for so many years? Why did He walk around wearing ordinary clothing and appearing like any other human being? Shouldn't He have worn the true natural garments of splendor and salvation demonstrating His righteousness? Or, did He?
33. 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.
34. In this lesson we have seen two contrasting pictures. In the days of Isaiah, Jerusalem and its environs were a sorry mess. By contrast, Isaiah was shown God Himself in His temple. We are challenged to be fair to the widows, the orphans, and the poor. Is there some kind of natural relationship between doing that and worshiping God correctly? Or, does God just bless those who do those things and curse those who do not? Does God just bless those who do good things for Him? Or Does God bless all of His children? Who keeps us alive? Who sends the rain and the sunshine? We wouldn't have anything if God didn't provide it!

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