

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

## ***A Brand Plucked From the Fire***

Lesson #9 for May 28, 2011

Scriptures: Zechariah 1-3; Revelation 12:10; Exodus 3:2-14; Ephesians 2:8-10; John 14:15.

1. Historically, Judah was at one of its lowest points. Two hundred years had passed since the northern kingdom of Israel had been decimated by Assyria and was carried off into oblivion. Nebuchadnezzar had conquered Judah three times; and finally, he utterly destroyed Jerusalem itself including Solomon's Temple. Judah had spent 70 years in Babylonian captivity. Finally, Cyrus conquered Babylon and wrote a decree permitting the Jews to return to their homeland. Only a relative handful were willing to make the perilous journey and try to set up homes in Palestine again. One of the first tasks they were to undertake—following instructions from Cyrus—was the rebuilding of a temple. But, Joshua the high priest and Zerubbabel the political leader had barely undertaken the laying of a foundation when their enemies managed to get the building stopped. Fifteen years went by with no progress.
2. Then, God called Haggai, an elderly prophet, and Zechariah, his young associate, with messages to arouse the people to return to their religious roots and rebuild the temple.
3. At that time, Zechariah was given a number of brief visions from God to try to inspire the progress.
4. One of those visions, found in Zechariah 3:1-10, is of particular interest to us. In that vision Joshua the high priest was standing before the angel of the Lord, and beside Joshua stood Satan to accuse him. Joshua was dressed in filthy garments representing the sins of himself and the people. But, fortunately, the angel of the Lord who has always been the special representative of God to His creatures entered the scene and rebuked Satan, the accuser of the brethren. (Revelation 12:10)
5. Jesus turned to His angel associates and said, "Take off the filthy clothes he's wearing.' Then He said to Joshua, 'I have accepted your repentance and taken away your sin. I will give you new clothes to wear.'" (Zechariah 3:4, *The Clear Word*) Joshua who was functioning in the position of a high priest was then dressed in a new set of garments appropriate for the high priest, a clean turban and a clean white robe.
6. Our Bible study guide suggests that this short exchange is the essence of the great controversy. Is that true? Does God win the great controversy by saving one soul at a time?
7. If so, how do we explain quotations like the following from Ellen White?

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. To this result of His great sacrifice—its influence upon the intelligences of other worlds, as well as upon man—the Saviour looked forward when just before His crucifixion He said: 'Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all unto Me.' John 12:31,32. The act of Christ in dying for the salvation of man would not only make heaven accessible to men [and women], but before all the universe it would justify God and His Son in their dealing with the rebellion of Satan. It would establish the perpetuity of the law of God and would reveal the nature and the results of sin. *Patriarchs and Prophets* 68,69 (1890); *Reflecting Christ* 60 (1985)

8. Are we, as human beings, so egocentric that we really believe that the great controversy is all about us? **The great controversy is about God!**
9. Ellen White, in particular, but Scriptures as well, make it very clear that the great controversy is about God, about His character, and about His government. The question is, "Can God be trusted?" From the beginning of our earth's history, Satan has claimed that God is a liar. (Genesis 3:1-4) Who are we going to believe? Satan has also made innumerable other accusations against God as well as his accusations against us. Please note that Satan is accusing us of doing things that he tempted us to do!
10. If we step back from the historical scene and review the evidence, Haggai and Zechariah were two of the most successful prophets in all the Bible. They set about to accomplish a task. Within six months, people were rallying around them; within four years, the temple was completed.
11. At the same time, God was calling for a revival and reformation among His people equal to what they were doing for the temple—rebuilding a relationship with God.
12. In the vision we are studying, Joshua was described as a brand plucked from the fire. Would that description be appropriate for us in our day? Joshua found himself covered with filthy garments representing his sins and the sins of the people. How does this passage in Scripture help us to understand what happens in the process of dealing with our sins?
13. As high priest, Joshua was expected to represent not only himself but all his people before God. As we know, Satan has been incredibly successful in convincing human beings to choose his side instead of God's side. Often, he tries to convince us that our sins are so great that God will not take us back.
14. When accusing God, Satan has to lie. But, when accusing us, all he has to do is point to the evidence. He has been very successful as an accuser of the brethren. (Revelation 12:10) Remember that he is accusing us of sins that he has tempted us to commit!
15. Are we individually in the same position as Joshua was? What changes do we need to make in order to provide God with the evidence He needs to claim us as His? We notice that in the vision, God called on angels to remove the filthy garments. In our own experience, we need to learn that we cannot stamp out sin. The only way we can get rid of sin is to crowd it out. Instead of focusing on our past sins and how they can be forgiven, we need to turn and focus on Jesus Christ and how we can become like Him and serve Him. If we do this through Bible study, prayer, and witnessing, in effect, we are giving the Holy Spirit and His angel associates the opportunity to enter our thinking domain and change us as He changed Joshua. Are we willing to give the Holy Spirit a chance?
16. How often have we tried by our own methods to eliminate sin from our lives? How successful have we been? When we realize that we have failed, do we become discouraged? Does that give Satan an opportunity to step in with more of his lies about God? Do we sometimes become discouraged? Are we tempted to give up?
17. In this story what is the specific role of the Angel of the Lord? Remembering that the word *angel* is a word for messenger and that Michael the Archangel is another name for Jesus Christ Himself, we need to turn to Him on a daily, even an hourly, basis. Our Bible study guide for Tuesday, May 24 suggests, "The Angel of the Lord, Jesus, is there to save and redeem. This is, without exception, the most important truth in all Scripture." Is that consistent with the following words from Ellen White?

It was in order that the heavenly universe might see the conditions of the covenant of redemption that Christ bore the penalty in behalf of the human race.  
**The throne of Justice must be eternally and forever made secure, even tho**

**the race be wiped out, and another creation populate the earth.** By the sacrifice Christ was about to make, all doubts would be forever settled, and the human race would be saved if they would return to their allegiance. Christ alone could restore honor to God's government. The cross of Calvary would be looked upon by the unfallen worlds, by the heavenly universe, by Satanic agencies, by the fallen race, and every mouth would be stopped....Who is able to describe the last scenes of Christ's life on earth, His trial in the judgment hall, His crucifixion? Who witnessed these scenes?—The heavenly universe, God the Father, Satan and his angels. *The Signs of the Times*, July 12, 1899 (4ST 44:1:2)

Clearly, the essence of the great controversy is the truth about God and His government!

18. Although it is not a good idea to focus on our sins, it is useful, at times, to turn and take a hard look at where we are. As we have already noted, the people of Jerusalem had gone through some terrible times. How far had they gone from God? Consider the following passages: **2 Kings 17**; Ezekiel 16, 23; Hosea 1-4. Even in Solomon's day, things had deteriorated enormously as he turned from building the temple and worshiping God to appeasing his thousand wives and even burning his own children to the god Molech. (1 Kings 11) They rebelled against God for so long that God had to let them go!
19. Unfortunately, as human beings and His creatures, we have an incredible ability to deceive ourselves. Many examples could be given. One of the most incredible of all is the story of Satan himself. Having fallen from heaven where he stood next to the throne of God, he has become so self-deluded that even at the third coming, he will try to rally his people and tell them that they can conquer the New Jerusalem! Are we going to follow his example?
20. After removing the filthy garments from Joshua, the angels placed a clean turban on his head and clean white robes on his body. But, that is not the end of the story. He was called to live a life of obedience.
21. What does this metaphor teach us about the process of salvation? When the filthy garments have been removed, what is our status before God?

As the intercession of Joshua is accepted, the command is given, "Take away the filthy garments from him," and to Joshua the Angel declares, "Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment." "So they set a fair miter upon his head, and clothed him with garments." Zechariah 3:4,5. His own sins and those of his people were pardoned. Israel was 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" (Exodus 28:36), 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; *Prophets and Kings* 584.2.

22. It is interesting to note that:

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. *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, for Wednesday, May 25.

23. How do you understand those words?
24. All of us—whether we like to admit it or not—are addicted to sin. People who are trained

professionally to deal with addictions know that there is a certain sequence of events that often leads to failure on the part of addicts. At first, they rationalize about their behavior, believing that they can take it or leave it. Often, this is followed by projection—that is, imagining that someone or something else is responsible for causing them to do these awful things. A rapid descent then takes place until there is actual repression of thoughts. He/she does not allow himself/herself to think of what is happening to himself/herself. He/she tosses out any precautions or warnings that might have been given. And finally, there is a state of altered memory. He/she actually makes up history, rewriting to his/her own satisfaction a story that allows him/her to feel better about what he/she has done. Is this how we deal with sin? Are we addicts? Sometimes, addicts destroy themselves and even others around them. How often do we go back again and again and commit the same sins? The first step every addict must take is to admit the problem is big and that he needs help.

25. What does Ellen White say about the solution?

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.

26. Is that our only hope of salvation? Our Bible study guide suggests that these final words should be emblazoned in the hearts of all God's people. What was she talking about when she talked about Christ's merits? What are merits?

27. For hundreds of years, the Roman Catholic Church has taught that saints are people who have built up enough merits in their own lives to more than adequately atone for their own sins so that the excess merits can be applied to the lives of others, thus helping them on their way to salvation. How are "Christ's merits" transferred to us?

28. Read Ephesians 2:8-10; John 14:15; Romans 6:1-4. Do we have to "keep His commandments" in order to get those merits? We must admit that salvation is a gift. But, once we have put on the robe of Christ's righteousness, He expects obedience. Why is it that so many Christians appear to go right on sinning? Is it that they have not really put on the robe of Christ's righteousness? When they choose to sin, what happens? Once again, we need to remember that we must stop focusing on sin and turn our focus onto Christ. It is great to have His promises of forgiveness, but it is not His plan for us to come back again and again and again asking for forgiveness from the same sins. (Compare Matthew 18:21-23)

29. Romans 8 tells us that all three Members of the Godhead are doing everything They can to help us in the process of salvation. What more help could we possibly ask for? All heaven rejoices when one sinner repents. (Luke 15:7,10)

30. For those of us who believe in the great-controversy, trust, healing model of the plan of salvation, the great controversy is not just about how God saves you and me. Most of all, it is about God and His character and government. That controversy takes place in our brains. We either vote for God, or we vote for the Devil—depending upon how we choose to spend our time. If we act in selfish ways, we are following the Devil. By allowing the Holy Spirit to become an ever more important part of our lives, are we preparing ourselves to be among the final people who stand on God's side at the end of this earth's history? Or, are we taking the easy path and following the Devil's suggestions by refusing to take off the filthy robes? Why would anyone want to keep those filthy robes?

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