Contents

1  In the Loom of Heaven—March 26–April 1—5
2  From Exalted to Cast Down—April 2–8—17
3  A Garment of Innocence—April 9–15—29
4  The Coat of Different Colors—April 16–22—41
5  The Priestly Garments of Grace—April 23–29—53
6  Elijah’s and Elisha’s Mantle—April 30–May 6—65
7  In the Shadow of His Wings—May 7–13—77
8  Garments of Splendor—May 14–20—89
9  A Brand Plucked From the Fire—May 21–27—101
10 The Prodigal’s New Clothes—May 28–June 3—113
11 The Wedding Garment—June 4–10—125
12 More Clothing Imagery—June 11–17—137
13 Clothed in Christ—June 18–24—149

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We 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 actually can be what they stand 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 throughout the Bible, symbols and 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
sanctuary 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 of 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 that 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), are all 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.

Although, of course, 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.
How to Use This Teachers Edition

Get Motivated to Explore, Apply, and Create

We hope that this format of the teachers edition will encourage adult Sabbath School class members to do just that—explore, apply, and create. Each weekly teachers lesson takes your class through the following learning process, based on the Natural Learning Cycle:

1. Why is this lesson important to me? (Motivate);
2. What do I need to know from God’s Word? (Explore);
3. How can I practice what I’ve learned from God’s Word? (Apply); and

And for teachers who haven’t had time to prepare during the week for class, there is a one-page outline of easy-to-digest material in “The Lesson in Brief” section.

Here’s a closer look at the four steps of the Natural Learning Cycle and suggestions for how you, the teacher, can approach each one:

**Step 1—Motivate:** Link the learners’ experiences to the central concept of the lesson to show why the lesson is relevant to their lives. Help them to answer the question, Why is this week’s lesson important to me?

**Step 2—Explore:** Present learners with the biblical information they need to understand the central concept of the lesson. (Such information could include facts about the people; the setting; cultural, historical, and/or geographical details; the plot or what’s happening; and conflicts or tension of the texts you are studying.) Help learners answer the question, What do I need to know from God’s Word?

**Step 3—Apply:** Provide learners with opportunities to practice the information given in Step 2. This is a crucial step; information alone is not enough to help a person grow in Christ. Assist the learners in answering the question, How can I apply to my life what I’ve learned?

**Step 4—Create:** Finally, encourage learners to be “doers of the word, and not hearers only” *(James 1:22).* Invite them to make a life response to the lesson. This step provides individuals and groups with opportunities for creative self-expression and exploration. All such activities should help learners answer the question, With God’s help, what can I do with what I’ve learned from this week’s lesson?

When teachers use material from each of these four steps, they will appeal to most every student in their class: those who enjoy talking about what’s happening in their lives, those who want more information about the texts being studied, those who want to know how it all fits in with real life, and those who want to get out and apply what they’ve learned.
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 to which their faith calls them. 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 by 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 reflects perfectly the character of Jesus? What Christian, no matter how faithful, staring in the mirror, can claim any kind of righteousness for himself or 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?

The phrase “filthy rags” refers to 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?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: Romans 6:1–13

The Student Will:

Know: Recognize the depths of our depravity and the complete perfection of Christ’s gift of righteousness and right living.

Feel: Sense our deep need to be crucified in Christ and our need to be raised to life in Christ.

Do: Take hold of what Christ has done for us in covering us with His righteousness and press onward, daily surrendering our wills to Him.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: No Threads of Our Own

A Why is it so important to recognize that all of our best efforts cannot bring us salvation?

B As we examine the perfection of Christ’s generous gift of righteousness in contrast with our depravity, what are we drawn to conclude?

II. Feel: Longing for the Robe Woven in Heaven

A How does the contrast between our imperfections and Christ’s perfect goodness make us feel?

B How are our longings to be clothed satisfied by the acceptance of Christ’s robe of righteousness, and how do we articulate our joy?

III. Do: A Daily Choice

A What is the connection between accepting the righteous robe of Christ, woven in heaven, and living His life of obedience here on earth? What must we do daily in order to live with Christ?

Summary: Christ’s robe of righteousness is a gift, undeserved and unmerited. However, we must accept its provisions, daily surrendering our wills, wants, and desires to God. We must allow Christ to live out His own will, wants, and desires in our lives.
Imputed Righteousness

No question, any honest Christian who looks 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?

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?
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: However good we may think we are, or may seem to others, our goodness ultimately has no merit toward salvation. We are all sinners in need of the divine grace symbolized in the Bible as Christ’s robe of perfect righteousness.

Just for Teachers: Emphasize that, although it is impossible for us to be good on our own, we can be seen as good by God if we allow ourselves to be clothed by Christ’s righteousness. This should motivate us to become more like Christ in actual fact, for which the theological term is sanctification, or being made holy.

What if your whole life were to be judged by your worst moment—the worst thing you’ve ever done, or your most selfish, vile thought? Perhaps it’s something no other living human being knows about, something that would cause others to avoid or ostracize you. Or maybe it’s just horribly embarrassing and not really representative of who you are. “That’s not me anymore,” you say. “Ask me about the orphan in Bangladesh whom I’m putting through school.”

OK, what about the orphan in Bangladesh you’re putting through school? What about all the other things you’ve done that helped your community and humanity at large? All those years of no smoking, no drinking, and no drug using, even when others thought it made you “weird” or “boring”; the lifetime of faithful church attendance when all your cool friends were bashing organized religion and talking about how they were “spiritual, but not religious”? That should count for something, even be weighed against the bad things, shouldn’t it?

Unfortunately, it doesn’t. In fact, from God’s point of view, the good things we do (virtually indistinguishable from the bad things) are described in the Bible as filthy rags. Is that fair? After all, you did your best. But God requires perfection, and you’re not perfect. He has every right to leave it like that. Instead, He offers us all the opportunity to exchange our filthy rags for the robe of His perfect righteousness, given to us by the saving life, death, and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ.

Discuss With the Class: God could view each one of us as a failed experiment; instead, He sacrifices Himself to give us something we don’t have and could never have on our own. What should our response be, and why?

CONTINUED
**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 quoted above said?

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Although 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.**
STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: Emphasize that the Bible draws a clear distinction between righteousness that comes from God and righteousness that we humans fabricate in order to feel better about ourselves and our lost condition. On the outside they may appear identical. But human righteousness is ultimately superficial. It comes from a confused jumble of motives and is ultimately ineffectual. The righteousness of God, on the other hand, leads to salvation, both for ourselves and for those with whom we come in contact.

Bible Commentary

I. Righteousness Like Filthy Rags (Review Isaiah 64:5–7 with your class.)

Prophets such as Isaiah are best known for being spoken to by God and for relaying the message. But the relationship was not unilateral. Prophets also spoke to God. Perhaps what distinguished them was their willingness to seek God out in what we would call prayer and their greater-than-average desire to hear an answer. In any case, there are many examples of prophets talking to God, and this passage is one.

This is important because it is not God who is telling Isaiah that his righteousness is like filthy rags, but Isaiah himself who is coming to that realization. Isaiah is speaking for his people, most of whom do not yet realize this fact. Collectively, Isaiah’s people have known that no god—or anything else on earth—has done for anyone what the God of Israel has done for His people. Yet they’ve still willfully decided to ignore Him and His righteousness, attempting to formulate their own righteousness, which—they think—would allow them to achieve salvation apart from God.

When it comes time for the system they have constructed to be put to the test, it proves to be worthless, not what it claimed to be at all, and devoid of power.

People in that position might well think that God has abandoned them. But really, it was they who have abandoned God. However far we may go from God, God calls us back and will use any means necessary and available to draw us to Him.

Consider This: Have you ever left God behind without even realizing it? Perhaps you wanted something that was incompatible with God, but you convinced yourself that you could have God and . . . Or maybe you abandoned or ignored God for something that was good in itself but not up
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 disguised partner apprehending and arresting his partner. 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?

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? In what areas are you struggling? How can you make the choice daily to die to self and live the new life in Christ that is offered us?
to the task of being your personal savior. Inevitably, the time comes when
one has to evaluate one’s choices and decide whether what one has trusted
was worthy of the trust. Only God passes the test every time. Discuss what
this means with your class.

II. Covered (Review Romans 4:7, 8 with your class.)

“Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are
covered” (NIV). This statement, appearing in Romans 4:7 as a quotation
of Psalm 32:1, is remarkable more for what is not said than what is said.
The word used here and translated as blessed means “happy” in the origi-
nal Hebrew. Happy can refer to the feeling of happiness, but it also refers
to good fortune. He or she whose sins are forgiven and covered feels joy
and relief at the good fortune of God’s grace. God’s grace is not a mat-
ter of chance or circumstance, but it is so different from what we might
expect it to be that it seems like good fortune to us. Also, like good fortune
or circumstance, we have nothing to do with it. We cannot put God in a
better mood by donating more money or sacrificing a goat. God forgives
us and covers our sins because He is God, and that is His character.

We might expect the verse to say, “Blessed is he or she who has no
sin.” But then it would take on a completely different meaning. Few of us
would deny that we would be happy if we never sinned and did not have
to face the consequences of our own, or others’, transgressions. But none
of us could say that. If the passage did read as above, it would be holding
up a standard no one could reach. Blessedness would also have a different
meaning. It would mean, essentially, that God recognizes and rewards
your achievement of a sinless state, if such a thing were possible.

Happy are we that we have a God who forgives our sins and helps us to
overcome them, rather than a God who merely hands us a map and says,
“I hope you make it!”

Consider This: We all have various circumstances in our lives. But as
this verse tells us, what really matters is that our sins are forgiven and that
we have fellowship with God. How can this knowledge help us to face the
inevitable sorrow and suffering that will confront us as human beings living
in an imperfect world?

STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: Use the following questions and exercises to
Cheap Grace and Legalism

All throughout 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?

We must keep distinct, theologically, the imputed righteousness of Christ (the righteousness that justifies us) from the work that the Holy Spirit does within 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 for today again. 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?
emphasize the need for all of us to claim Christ’s robe of righteousness in order to be accepted by God.

Thought Questions:
1. Let’s face it: the message of our own inadequacy to win favor with God and the necessity of claiming Christ’s life and death on our behalf is not new to most of us. Let’s also face the fact that we need to be reminded of it more often than not. Why is it so hard to integrate this realization into our ordinary lives and thoughts?

2. Reread the statement from the preacher in Tuesday’s study. In it the preacher notes that he has won many victories over sin in his life with Christ’s help. Yet, no matter how many victories he has won, or continues to win, it can never be enough.

Application Question:
In Christian theology, justification is the name of the legal status in which we are said to be not guilty of sin because of the substitution of Christ’s life for ours in the eyes of God the Judge. Sanctification is the process by which we actually become more holy. How does the knowledge of your justification help you to achieve a more sanctified life?

STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Perhaps the key idea in this lesson is the substitution of Christ’s record of perfect sinlessness and obedience to the law for our sin and disobedience. The following activities are meant to emphasize the necessity of accepting the new clothing offered by Christ for our justification, sanctification, and salvation.

The idea of having one’s appearance, one’s home, and so on, “made over” is popular at the present time. It has even been the theme of several reality television programs. Ask the class, “How has your relationship with Jesus allowed you to be made over?” In this instance the emphasis would be on positive changes that have occurred in one’s life. Of course, you want to keep focused on Jesus and gratitude to Him rather than self-glorification for bringing about these changes.

An alternative: Ask the class members to consider areas of their lives in which they might still need to be made over. Suggest that they take note of those areas and make them a topic of focused prayer in the coming days, weeks, or months, and that they look for changes.

“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 imubes 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:

1. 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?

2. In class, discuss your answer to Tuesday’s final question.

3. 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 it means to reflect the Lord’s glory.

4. 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 to understand where our assurance can come from? How can we know we’re not being presumptuous if we have that assurance?

5. 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?
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 for iniquity to arise, 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?

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?

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”?
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** Ezekiel 28:11–17

**The Student Will:**
- **Know:** Describe the circumstances and the consequences of Lucifer’s spiritual pride and the effects his pride has on life in both heaven and earth.
- **Feel:** Nurture attitudes of gratitude and humble acceptance of God’s gifts, rather than cherish spiritual pride, as Lucifer did.
- **Do:** Honor God’s supremacy and ownership of ourselves and every good thing we have in our hearts by the way we speak to Him, and about Him, to others.

**Learning Outline:**

I. Know: The Fall of the Brightest and Best
   - A How did Lucifer come to fall from a position of highest honor and beauty? What did he value more than God?
   - B In heaven and earth, what have been the consequences of his spiritual pride? What will be the final outcome?

II. Feel: Pride Versus Humility
   - A How are we tempted to fall into the same downward spiral that Satan experienced? What is our only hope?
   - B How can we foster attitudes of humility and gratitude rather than spiritual pride?

III. Do: Giving God His Due
   - A Since God is the Originator, the Author, of our very being, as well as all the blessings we enjoy, how should we respond to Him?
   - B Why is it an honor to respond this way?

**Summary:** In growing proud of his gifts and seeking more than what God gave him, Lucifer cultivated evil in his heart and encouraged doubt in others. This led to war in heaven and tragedy on earth.
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?

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 star” (Isa. 14:12, ASV and NLT). In Hebrew, ħtlel (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, unequalled, 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.
Learning Cycle

**STEP 1—Motivate**

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** The freedom that God gives us to choose Him and the way of life He desires for us also allows us to choose the opposite. God doesn’t force His way on us; we must consciously choose Him every day of our lives.

**Just for Teachers:** Emphasize that while God is sovereign—that is to say that everything is ultimately subject to Him—it is necessary to His purposes that we choose to serve Him of our own free will. This free will is a necessary precondition of the perfection that He wishes for us to achieve. As such, it is necessary that we have the freedom not to make the right choice.

Sentenced to two years in prison for burglary in the last year of Germany’s Weimar Republic, Waldemar Debbler addressed the court. He explained that free will did not exist and that his upbringing, heredity, and environment made it impossible for him to be anything other than what he was, a burglar. Therefore, he said, the court had no moral right to punish him.

The judge responded, saying that he was a determinist, too, and that the court was similarly bound to punish Debbler.

Debbler replied, “Destiny demands that I appeal.”

“That may be,” the judge rejoined, “but destiny also demands that your appeal be denied.”

As seen above, human free will has been seriously questioned many times in history. Yet, most of us continue to exist and act as though we did have the freedom and responsibility of free will. As Seventh-day Adventist Christians, we go further and say that God gave us free will, and that our greatest freedom and happiness come from using this free will to acknowledge and serve the God who created us. Unhappiness, evil, and suffering come from the opposite course, as seen in Lucifer’s freely made decision to reject God and His love.

**Discuss With the Class:** If Lucifer could reject God’s love with eyes wide open while existing in the very presence of God, what does this say about how deceptive our thoughts and perceptions can be if we cut ourselves off from God’s influence?

**STEP 2—Explore**

**Just for Teachers:** Emphasize that God is the Source of all good

CONTINUED
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 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 about Lucifer’s downfall? What important message should we take from this for ourselves?

The irony in all this is that however wonderful Lucifer’s coverings, however beautiful his person, however wise he was, we must ask, where did it all come from? Of course, whatever Lucifer had, whatever he achieved, whatever wonderful garment 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?

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 to 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?
things that exist, including our freedom to choose or reject His guidance for our lives. If we choose to ignore or reject God, we are opening the door to evil. The story of Lucifer exemplifies this sad truth. All his gifts came from God, and yet, when he made his decision to reject God, these same gifts were perverted and pressed into the service of evil and destruction.

Bible Commentary

I. The Light of All People *(Review John 1:1–5 with your class.)*

The name Lucifer means “light bearer” in Latin, a translation of earlier Hebrew and Greek words conveying the same concept, usually in reference to the planet Venus, which was associated with dawn. It is not completely clear that Lucifer was originally intended to be a proper name. Isaiah 14:12, where the passage on Lucifer first appears, addresses the king of Babylon. This has led some scholars to claim that the figure of Lucifer as we know him does not exist at all in the Old Testament. As Seventh-day Adventists, we reject any theology that denies the literal existence of Satan.

The king of Babylon was seen—and saw himself—as the representative of pagan deities and, possibly, even as a deity himself. In the mythology of ancient Near Eastern peoples, the morning star and the dawn were regarded as gods. The Greeks and Romans inherited them and often used them poetically, as when Homer referred to “rosy-fingered Dawn,” or Eos.

Two things (at least) are happening in this description. First, the being we refer to as Lucifer is clearly associated not only with pagan kingship and royalty but also with the system of pagan worship upon which it depended for its legitimacy. Second, both the terms *light bearer* and *morning star* contain important clues to this being’s nature and role.

To be a bearer of light is a very important task. But to bear light is not the same as to give light or to be the source of light. In his previous existence as an angel in heaven, Lucifer might have been a “bearer” of God’s light. At some point he apparently came to believe himself to be its source, or at least one source. He thought himself to be the equal of God and, at some point, His superior.

The morning star, or the planet Venus, is known to be the brightest body in the early-evening and early-morning sky. But it is such only because it happens to be in position to catch the reflected light of the sun. The light is not inherent to it; when the sun is gone, so is our view of the
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 amid our own temptations and struggles?

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 in which 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?
radiant planet Venus. In the same way, once Lucifer removed himself from the influence of God, his light went out, and he became the being we know as Satan.

**Consider This:** Most of us have, at one time or another, been disappointed by someone we regarded as a spiritual model. Or perhaps we believed ourselves to be free of old habits or behaviors that separated us from God, only to fall into them again in a moment of unwarniness. What happens when we begin to believe subconsciously that somehow our strength is our own, not God’s? Why do we, to reflect God’s light, need to make an effort to remain in His presence and under His influence?

**II. Devil in Disguise (Review 2 Corinthians 11:14 with your class.)**

According to the Greek philosopher Plato, “To prefer evil to good is not in human nature.” So, then, why does evil exist? Plato believed it came about because of ignorance of what is good. Of course, this isn’t what the Bible teaches about evil or the origin of evil or why people do evil; even though, at times, people might be deceived into thinking that their evil deeds are good, or at least not that bad. But the fact remains, evil must present itself as good in order to be attractive to most of us. This is why Satan—or Lucifer—must present himself as an angel of light.

Most of us have a conscience and a capacity for moral reasoning. These are powerful tools, but left to themselves, they aren’t always accurate. Indeed, in a world corrupted by sin, the line between good and evil isn’t always clear without the guidance of God and His Word.

As such, it isn’t necessary for Satan to urge us to commit acts or think thoughts that are unambiguously evil. He can make use of things that are ostensibly good or neutral, so long as they can distance us from the Source of good, God Himself.

**Consider This:** We live in a world in which we are confronted with choices, activities, or beliefs that may appear to be good or harmless or may bear the stamp of society’s approval, but that may not match with what we know to be correct from God’s Word. In addition, there are genuine shades of gray and predicaments that lend themselves to situational ethics. How can we claim God’s discernment to help us make sense of such things?
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. It 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?

Fortunately, because of the Cross and 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?

Satan works in various ways to deceive us and 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?
STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: Use the following questions and exercises to explore the issues of God’s creation of beings with free will and the evil that may—and has—resulted from it. Emphasize the freedom that God has given to us, and the responsibility to use it rightly.

Thought Question:
The creation of Lucifer—and the resulting evil—leads into the questions of foreknowledge and predestination. God, being omniscient or all-knowing, has foreknowledge of the results of the decisions of those He creates. Does this mean He predestines us to make those decisions? Why, or why not? If not, what does it mean when the Bible refers to predestination, as in Ephesians 1:5, 11?

Application Questions:
1. In Ezekiel 28:13, Lucifer’s garment or covering is emphasized. Specifically, it is stated that God covered Lucifer with all the precious stones and other items that enhanced his beauty. In a way, this speaks to the central point in question. God gave Lucifer the things that made him beautiful and (once) good, and Lucifer came to believe that he himself was somehow the origin of this beauty. Have you ever been tempted to assume that any gifts or good qualities you may have are somehow yours alone and that God has no claim on their use? What does the story of Lucifer suggest about the results of such thought patterns?

2. How can Satan sometimes work through Christians, and the church itself, to advance his agenda? How can we be on guard against this, without becoming judgmental and paranoid?

STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: This week we have examined the many factors that led Lucifer to entertain the thoughts and desires that led him to forsake his unique relationship with the God who created him. The following activity emphasizes the fact that we, too, are in danger of a similar end if we forget to honor God and allow Him to rule in our lives.

Lucifer’s fall began with thought. We all have thoughts that we would rather not have. Ask members of the class to share how they deal with and banish (or could deal with and banish) thoughts of hatred or jealousy or thoughts of committing or entertaining sin.

“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:**

1. 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.

2. 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?

3. 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.”

4. 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?

5. 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?
Lesson 3
*April 9–15

A Garment of Innocence

SABBATH AFTERNOON


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?

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.

**The connection** that Adam and Eve had 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.

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.

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?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: Genesis 2:20–25

The Student Will:
- **Know:** Compare the original clothing provided for Adam and Eve with the clothing the couple provided for themselves.
- **Feel:** Sense what it feels like to be spiritually clothed in Christ’s garment of righteousness.
- **Do:** Put on the spiritual clothing God has provided, rather than the covering you can provide for yourself.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: Light, Leaf, and Lamb
- **A** What were the differences between the clothing God provided before the Fall and after the Fall? What were the differences between the clothing Adam and Eve provided for themselves and the clothing God provided after the Fall?

II. Feel: Naked and Afraid
- **A** What emotional state of being did Adam and Eve enjoy before sin entered the picture?
- **B** What were the emotional results of the Fall, and how do we continue to suffer these effects?
- **C** What are the emotional benefits of being appropriately covered?

III. Do: Covered by Blood
- **A** What role did blood play in providing the clothing of Adam and Eve?
- **B** What role has blood continued to play in providing for our covering to this day?

Summary: The light that covered our first parents in innocent happiness was lost at the Fall. However, God provided another covering through the shedding of blood. This is all symbolic of what Christ does for us.
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?

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 which 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?
Learning Cycle

**STEP 1—Motivate**

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** When Adam and Eve, our first parents, sinned, the innocence and blamelessness that made it possible for them to commune with God face-to-face were lost. Nothing we can do for ourselves can restore this state. We must depend on Christ to replace our garments of innocence with His robe of righteousness.

**Just for Teachers:** Emphasize God’s grace in preparing a way for Adam and Eve—and the whole human race that would follow—to be saved and restored to the lost state of innocence that was forfeited when they disobeyed God.

Have you ever said words that you’ve regretted, even as you were saying them? Words that you couldn’t take back? Words so hurtful or stupid that you were praying for the earth to swallow you so that you wouldn’t have to face the consequences of having said them?

Or perhaps you were faced with a choice of two courses of action: one clearly moral and right, the other clearly wrong but somehow hard to resist. In one crucial moment you made your choice, and it was the wrong choice. You knew it, but it was done. Maybe you destroyed a friendship, a marriage, or a job. Unless it was really bad, you were probably able to learn from the experience and—with God’s help—go on with your life, although perhaps not exactly the same life. But take comfort in this: so far, you haven’t corrupted a planet.

Adam’s and Eve’s decision to disobey God was one of those irreversible, regrettable decisions; the big one that led to all the others, including yours. Instantly, they knew something was different, and it wasn’t good. As promised, they knew good and evil. They also knew a few other things: guilt, shame, hypocrisy, cowardice, selfishness, and alienation from the God who created them. They lost—literally and figuratively—their garments of innocence. But God could turn even this to good. Where He could have abandoned them to fear, uncertainty, or hopelessness, He gave them the promise that He would cover them in robes of righteousness.

**Discuss With the Class:** What does God’s reaction to Adam’s and Eve’s disobedience tell us about His character? What kind of hope can we, in our own mistakes and acts of disobedience, draw from this?
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?
Learning Cycle CONTINUED

STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: Emphasize that the innocence Adam and Eve lost is irrecoverable by our own efforts. Acceptance of the covering that God, through Christ, has purchased for us by means of His sacrifice on the cross is alone sufficient to allow us to commune with God and to restore His image in us.

Bible Commentary

I. “Their Eyes Were Opened” (Review Genesis 3:7 with your class.)

According to this passage, once Adam and Eve ate the fruit, their eyes were opened to the fact that they were naked. One can infer at least two possibilities from this: either they were always naked but previously had no basis on which to distinguish it from being clothed, or the eating of the fruit somehow resulted in their state of nakedness. Seventh-day Adventists have usually taken this text to mean that before the Fall, Adam and Eve were clothed in light, as are the angels. Taking the biblical passage strictly as it reads, one would tend to assume that they were naked, especially since, several verses back (Gen. 2:25), the text says that they were naked but not ashamed.

Whatever clothing the first couple may or may not have worn, it is clear that the function of their garments would have been quite different from that of clothing in the present world. Clothing today exists, at least partially, to conceal. Another purpose is to indicate social status or function in society. This was another thing that probably was not (yet) needed in the Garden of Eden, although it might have become desirable as the population increased. For example, angels traditionally are believed to have a hierarchy, and this might necessitate ways of distinguishing different ranks and functions by sight.

Essentially, before the Fall, Adam and Eve did not need that which clothing most basically provides: cover or concealment. One covers only what one is ashamed of, and shame did not exist. Any one of us can find any number of things to be ashamed of, whether or not they’re our fault. For example, people are ashamed of how their bodies look, and will pay others to tell them how to dress to minimize their flaws. We’ve all done or said things we’re ashamed of and rightly so. We all have thoughts we would never say out loud. Adam and Eve, on the other hand, were shameless because there was simply no reason for shame.

CONTINUED
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?

Their eyes were opened, just as Satan said they would be. Only now they were seeing the world and reality differently from how 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 realization that they are naked.

Notice, too, the Lord’s question to them: “‘Who told you that you were naked?’” (vs. 11, NIV). This 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’s and Eve’s response to their nakedness?

Imagine Adam and Eve hiding behind some bushes, looking at themselves with mouths agape and attempting to cover themselves before the Lord. Considering 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: 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 are ours today.
None of this necessarily contradicts the idea that they were clothed in light. Clothing, as we know it today, conceals. Light does the opposite of conceal (*John 3:19, 20*). Whereas clothing would have hidden things the wearer didn’t want seen and that others didn’t want to see, Adam and Eve were clothed in light, the ultimate revealer, because everything about them was worthy of being seen. They had nothing to hide.

**Consider This:** As soon as Adam and Eve realized their nakedness, they rushed to cover themselves. They even attempted to hide from an all-knowing and all-loving God. How are you hiding from God? What difference does it make to realize that He already knows and wants to free you from sin?

II. Leaves or Skins? (*Review Genesis 3:7, 21 with your class.*)

After committing the first sin, Adam and Eve arrived at the first inadequate solution for sin and the associated shame and alienation. Like so many other such solutions, it was logical, simple, and intuitive. Perhaps they even felt a moment of pride at identifying a new problem and its solution almost simultaneously. They now felt newly naked and vulnerable, but they could handle it as long as they had fig leaves.

Up to that moment, the resources of the Garden provided all that was needed for their survival. If they could cover themselves with fig leaves, perhaps they could continue as if nothing had changed. No need to disturb God about this matter. In fact, perhaps it would be better to stay out of God’s sight for a while.

But everything had changed. God appeared in the Garden, as He was accustomed to do, and the first couple fled in fear. With or without the fig leaves, they were no longer able to stand unashamed before God as they had before when they were naked. Like so many of our efforts to make ourselves right without God’s help, the fig-leaf stratagem succeeded only in making Adam and Eve seem to be right, and then only to themselves. It was a form of self-deception, and even failed in accomplishing that when put to the test.

Adam and Eve could have their sin blotted out. They could be restored to a relationship with God. But it would hurt. Real, warm, mammalian blood would have to be shed—a symbol of the blood of God Himself in the form of Jesus Christ.

**Consider This:** Ever since the Fall, humans have attempted, in their own ways, to confront and solve the problems of sin, evil, and suffering. These
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, which says, “[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 slain animals. 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?
ways have uniformly proved to be inadequate. What “fig leaves” have you used to attempt to solve your problems without God’s help?

**STEP 3—Apply**

**Just for Teachers:** Help your students to understand what Adam and Eve gave up when they listened to Satan in the Garden. Emphasize that God wants to return to us what we have lost.

**Thought Questions:**

1. What made the tree of which Adam and Eve were not to eat “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil”? Were Adam and Eve ignorant of good and evil? If so, how could they be trusted to make informed moral choices?

2. Why do you think the first thing that changed in the Garden after the eating of the fruit was shame of nakedness?

**Application Questions:**

1. God clearly had the option of protecting Adam and Eve from the responsibility of choosing to obey Him. He simply could have forbidden Satan access to the Garden, and, most likely, the issue would never have raised its ugly head. Have you, for example, as a parent, ever been in a situation in which you had to give your child the possibility of making the wrong choice when you would have rather protected him or her from it entirely?

2. Actions have consequences. Have you ever had to face the consequences of wrong, or ill-advised, words or actions where an “I’m sorry” wasn’t adequate?

**STEP 4—Create**

**Just for Teachers:** Two themes become clear in the story of Adam and Eve: the beautiful and terrible burden of human freedom which allows us to love and serve God willingly and joyfully, yet also allowed our first parents to betray God at the earliest opportunity and necessitated the death of God’s Son; and the love and forgiveness of God, who was immediately at work engineering the salvation of the wayward human race. The following activity will illustrate these themes.

Mention how Adam and Eve failed their first and only test. In our human relationships, we may lose confidence or trust in a person over one spectacular betrayal, even after a lifetime of trustworthiness. Adam and Eve had no such record. God had every reason to abort the experiment, but He didn’t. What does this say about forgiveness and, literally, about a redemptive approach to human relationships?

“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:

1. Read Genesis 3:6. Which avenues to Eve’s soul was the devil able to take advantage of as he was seeking to make her fall? How do these same things work for him today, as well?

2. 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 in that situation?

3. Read the two Ellen G. White quotes in Friday’s study. How is the wonderful truth of the gospel revealed in those words?

4. 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 at an earlier time 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”?
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 if Jacob had 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?

“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? 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?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: Genesis 37:3

The Student Will:
Know: Describe the part that Joseph’s coat of many colors played at the heart of this story of a father’s love for a son, and the anger and jealousy that the brothers displayed.
Feel: Empathize with the conflicting emotions that played out in the long history of Jacob’s family relationships.
Do: Submit the challenges that arise in our own family relationships to the control and mediation of God.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: Coat of Love and Hatred
   A What were the various circumstances that caused so many conflicts in Jacob’s family?
   B How did Joseph’s coat of many colors figure in a major crisis?
   C How did God bring good out of this conflicted family? What part did Jacob’s 12 sons play in the history of Israel, and what part will they have in the New Jerusalem?

II. Feel: Painful Memories Healed
   A How were the many strong emotions of anger, jealousy, fear, and grief resolved in Jacob’s family story?
   B What part did forgiveness play in this healing?

III. Do: Family Ties
   A Why do some of the most difficult relationships occur between family members?
   B What challenges do we face in our own families, and what steps do we need to take toward healing?

Summary: Of the many challenges that Jacob faced in his family relationships, his grief over his lost son was one of the most painful. Yet God used this situation to save many during a widespread famine and to bring healing to Jacob’s family as well.
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, jealousy, favoritism, pride, all of which 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?

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 worsen relations between Joseph and his brothers?

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. Although 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 upon 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 realized 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?
Learning Cycle

**STEP 1—Motivate**

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** As free beings we can choose to ignore God and place Him on the periphery. But there are dire consequences for doing so, most of which arise from the course of human nature and our choices. As such, we should make the wisdom of God the primary influence in our decisions.

**Just for Teachers:** Emphasize the importance of adopting God’s values as we make our way through a world that can corrupt us and encourage us to cut moral, ethical, and spiritual corners.

The Order of Stanislaus was an honor granted by the Polish crown, dating from 1765 until 1832, when Poland lost its nominal independence in the disastrous November Uprising. From then on, the Russian czars took over the awarding of the Order of Stanislaus. Calculatedly, they awarded it primarily to Polish officials who were most diligent in suppressing strivings for Polish political and cultural independence. So it was that this medal—formerly one of the highest honors that could be bestowed by the Polish crown, and named after a Polish national hero—became a symbol of disgrace in the eyes of the Polish people.

A story is told of the mayor of a small Polish town who was “lucky” enough to receive this medal for his service to the Russian occupiers. In ideal circumstances, a medal such as this would have been worn on special occasions or to impress others. But, instead, the mayor promptly hid it away, knowing that it would only make him an object of hatred to his own people and possibly a target of Polish nationalists.

He did find a use for it, though—one that continued through many generations of his family. When a child was particularly ill-behaved, he or she would be confined to the house and forced to wear the heavy, ungainly Order of Stanislaus until sundown.

Many of the worldly honors and comforts we esteem so highly turn out to have a terrible downside. We get them for the wrong reasons or for doing the wrong things. They incite anger or envy in others. Or they may change us in undesirable ways. Like the Order of Stanislaus—or Joseph’s coat of many colors, which we will be studying this week—they may come to mean the opposite of what we thought they meant. Joseph’s story really began only when he lost the coat and was forced to make God his center.

CONTINUED
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?

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 concluded 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 Joseph’s brothers’ 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.
Discuss With the Class: Have you ever experienced a situation in which something that seemed at first to be a blessing became a catalyst for spiritual or temporal difficulties or adversity? What did you learn from it?

STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: Emphasize the importance of considering the impact of one’s actions on others and oneself, and the necessity of allowing God to guide our decisions.

Bible Commentary

I. “Coat of Many Colors” (Review Genesis 37:3 with your class.)

The nature of the coat of many colors referred to in this passage is uncertain. The original Hebrew refers to it as ketonet passim, or, literally, a long robe with sleeves, or possibly a long-sleeved coat with stripes. The assumption of many colors seems to come from the Septuagint, the authoritative Greek translation of the Old Testament from the late centuries B.C. Such a garment later became a prerogative of royalty or other distinguished personages. For example, in 2 Samuel 13:18, 19 the author notes that Tamar and others in the court of David wore such robes or coats. Perhaps the translators of the Septuagint wanted to emphasize the specialness and centrality of this garment in the narrative.

Indeed, this garment was special: anyone fortunate enough to have one would undoubtedly put a lot of thought into preserving it and keeping it from loss or harm. Jacob and his family apparently derived their livelihood from herding animals, probably sheep and goats. A long robe with sleeves was not ideal for a day in the pastures, which were most likely conglomerations of scrub and brush rather than the green fields we may think of when that word is mentioned. So when Jacob gave Joseph this robe, he was essentially saying either that Joseph did not have to work like the others, or he was assigning him a supervisory role.

In a society in which status was everything, and in which division of authority and labor was based strictly upon age, among other things, the favoritism shown by Jacob to Joseph must have been, to his older brothers, not only irksome but nearly incomprehensible. Jacob sent Joseph on errands that clearly put him in the role of what we would today call middle management. From the fact that Joseph was wearing the coat at the time of his “death,” we can infer that he wore it everywhere, and
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 that 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 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?
Learning Cycle CONTINUED

that it functioned—much to his brothers’ resentment—as a mark of his authority.

Consider This: In this situation, one can truly say that everyone involved made mistakes. Joseph’s were relatively innocent and unthinking, whereas those of his brothers were not so much mistakes as crimes, however legitimate some of their grievances may have been. How do you react when you feel that you have been treated unfairly or when someone has advanced at what you feel is your expense?

II. Rock Bottom (Review Genesis 37:26–36 with your class.)

Rock bottom. The legendary place alcoholics or other addicts have to hit before they know they need help. Where there is nowhere to go but up. Whatever cliché one may choose, Joseph was there, and it was a precipitous fall indeed. Worse yet, he most likely didn’t know why he was there or what he had done to deserve it, although the modern reader could probably identify a few things.

Many different kinds of pits exist. A literal pit such as the one Joseph was in, while it is not to be wished for oneself or anyone else, has its advantages. At least one knows where one is, and even being raised out of it to be sold into slavery is probably preferable to being left to face starvation and the elements. As Samuel Johnson said of the gallows, being in a pit undoubtedly concentrates the mind wonderfully. In Joseph’s case, it might even have been his rite of passage into spiritual and psychological maturity.

Consider This: Like Joseph’s brothers we have all dug ourselves into pits. We try to deny that we are in pits. We try to rationalize the actions that brought us to these places. The deeper we find ourselves, the deeper we want to go, until we hit “rock bottom.” Why does our only way out come when we discover that the only One who can, and will, bring us out is the One we have sinned against, God Himself?

STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: Help your students to recognize the need to accept God’s guidance in their lives for both eternal and temporal reasons and to avoid behaviors that put them outside of the will of God.
“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?

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.” 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 after 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 the brothers’ deeds had on themselves and their family?

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.
Learning Cycle CONTINUED

Thought Questions:

1. There are essentially two schools of thought regarding the consequences of human sin. One is that God actively punishes us for our sins, either vindictively or redemptively, as a means of leading sinners toward Himself. The other is that God merely lets us reap the consequences of our actions, removing His protection. Which do you believe? How do you support your viewpoint?

2. How do you feel about Joseph as he is presented in the early part of the story? While he is the hero, what are some of his unattractive qualities? How does he change and grow as a result of his experiences?

Application Question:

Have you ever allowed your negative feelings toward another person to get out of control? If so, what happened as a result? What did you learn from the experience? How can we prevent such thoughts and feelings from taking root in the first place?

STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: In the story of Joseph, we see decisions and actions affect things and people that would seem, at first glance, to be quite remote from them. The following activities will help to illustrate how even small decisions that we think affect only ourselves (and possibly those immediately around us) can have wide-ranging and long-lasting results, for good or ill.

Object Lesson: Bring a radio to class. Demonstrate how the radio receives invisible signals from far away. These signals were not emitted with the thought of influencing this particular radio or the particular people listening to it, but they do. In the same way, our actions can influence people far away in space or time; even people we don’t know exist. This is definitely something to be considered when we do things that we think are insignificant.

Alternatively, tell a story about something you’ve done that had an effect on someone or something you weren’t aware of at the time. It can be positive or negative, depending on how open you want to be. Encourage others to share their stories as well.

“Joseph, unsuspicious 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 to be 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 that 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?
Lesson 5

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 that which 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 themselves 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 with which we have been entrusted.

Hence this principle 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?

The apostasy itself was bad enough, but that Aaron acquiesced to it seems even more incredible. Think about all with which Aaron had been privileged. 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.

But 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, although 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 that all is not lost, even despite your mistakes?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: 1 Peter 2:9

The Student Will:

Know: Recognize aspects of God’s provisions for us, and the illustration of His character, in the priestly role of Aaron and the clothing of his office.

Feel: Nurture a sense of the holiness and purity God calls us to have as His royal priesthood and holy nation.

Do: Accept Christ as our High Priest and take advantage of His provisions for forgiving us, cleansing us, and enabling us to live a holy life.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: In the Steps of Priestly Royalty

A How does Aaron’s role as priest reflect Jesus and His priestly royal ministry to us today?

B How did Aaron’s garments and breastplate illustrate God’s role for Israel as His representative among the nations, as well as Christ’s role as high priest?

II. Feel: Pure and Holy

A How was Aaron to represent God’s glory and beauty?

B What emotions were called forth as a result of witnessing the richness and splendor of his high priestly garb?

III. Do: Christ, Our High Priest

A What are we called to do in response to Christ’s ministry as High Priest?

B What must we depend on Christ to do for us?

C How are we, as royal priests and a holy nation, to represent God’s glory, holiness, and perfection today?

Summary: Aaron’s priestly role and garments illustrate the role Christ has played as One “tempted as we are,” bearing our sins but also connecting us to the pure and holy perfection of God.
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.

However difficult some of these concepts are for us to grasp today, 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?
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** The priests of the Old Testament era were a distinct class of people specially dedicated to God. They could easily be identified by their unique, symbolic garments. As Christians, we are also priests in a very real sense and should be recognizable by the work of Christ within us.

**Just for Teachers:** Emphasize the parallel between the special garments worn by the priests to serve before God and the figurative robes of Christ’s righteousness that allow us to come before God in our state as sinful humans.

In 1972, journalist David Halberstam published *The Best and the Brightest*, a book on the architects of U.S. policy in Vietnam in the early 1960s. The title of Halberstam’s book referred to the fact that these individuals had received the best education in the best institutions of higher learning, and most had achieved—prior to their involvement in the emerging U.S. Vietnam strategy—notable successes and triumphs in business, government, and academia. Why then, Halberstam asked, did the policies they formulated and put into place prove to be disastrous?

If you look at biblical history, God rarely chooses the “best and the brightest.” And when the “best and the brightest” do stumble into the sacred story, they often prove not to be so bright and good after all. Examples include King Saul, Judas, and Solomon. His best servants often don’t start out so well. Moses committed murder on impulse, fled into the desert, and tried to talk his way out of his mission. Jonah fled in the opposite direction to avoid confronting his own fear and bigotry. Paul was a persecutor and an enabler of mob violence.

None of us are the “best and brightest.” And if we are, it’s only because the standards are so low. God’s royal priesthood is made up of repentant sinners and recovering “best and brightest” who realize that they need the garments of Christ’s grace and righteousness.

**Discuss With the Class:** What does it mean that we as Christians are, in a very real sense, priests of God? How should this affect our views of ourselves and our places in the world?
Priestly Garments

“And these are the garments which they shall make; a breast-plate, and an ephod, and a robe, and a brodered 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 regarding 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 general spiritual lessons can we take from what is being presented here?

“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.
Learning Cycle CONTINUED

STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: Attempt to draw parallels between the duties and roles of the priests of Old Testament times and our roles and functions as members of the church.

Bible Commentary

I. “Priest of the Most High God . . .” (Review Genesis 14:18–20 with your class.)

The episode recounted in Genesis 14:18–20 is one of the most intriguing in the Old Testament. Who was Melchizedek? Where did he come from? What was the nature of the primordial priesthood which he apparently represented, one that predated the Levitical priesthood with which we are mostly concerned?

Melchizedek’s name tells us a lot about him. Its Semitic roots literally mean “sacred [or righteous] king.” He is described as a king, as well as a priest, and he reigns in Salem, which most scholars identify with Jerusalem. Christians, from the author of Hebrews (7:1–3) on, tend to implicitly identify him with Christ. After all, only Christ is truly worthy of being described as a holy or sacred king. Kingship among the Israelites was intended to be exercised under the authority of God, but rarely was. There is no parallel in the biblical tradition for regarding a human king as a demigod, as there was among neighboring peoples in the ancient world. Even David, who was regarded as a type of the Messiah, could not have been described as particularly holy. Yet Melchizedek, as Christ, was a “sacred king.”

Also, Melchizedek was “king of [the city of] Salem,” which literally meant “king of peace.” That parallels quite well with “prince of peace,” another appellation of Christ.

It is also interesting to note that, while we typically assume that worship of the true God did not exist at that time (apart from Abraham) Melchizedek’s presence refutes this assumption. Melchizedek had nothing whatsoever to do with Abraham or his lineage; yet, somehow, Abraham knew who he was and recognized his authority.

Consider This: In Hebrews 7:3, Melchizedek is described as being free of human attachments. There was nothing about him that could be attributed to human lineage, origin, or achievement. What does this say
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 are the meanings 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.

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; although 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 this 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 in 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.

How have you 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?
about our salvation and our incorporation into Christ’s royal priesthood, known as the church?

II. Urim and Thummim (Review Exodus 28:15–30 with your class.)

In Exodus, the word we translate as breastplate in actuality means “pouch” or “container.” This may be because its primary purpose was to contain the Urim and Thummim. We don’t know what form the Urim and Thummim took precisely, but we do know that they were oracular devices, meant to answer questions important to the affairs of the people of Israel.

The terms Urim and Thummim are traditionally translated to mean “lights” and “perfections.” Interestingly, the roots of the words seem to pertain to the concepts of guilt and innocence. Other possible meanings are, respectively, “cursed” or “faultless,” in respect to one’s standing before God. To the extent to which the words refer to light, it seems to be light with an investigative or searching quality—the light that expels and dispels darkness and evil, as referred to in John 3:19. Their function is to examine or search people or situations and determine their true nature. Many ancient peoples had their oracles, oracular devices, and means of divination. Almost without exception, they were intended to answer questions about expediency or the probability of success in a given course of action. The Urim and Thummim differed in that the direction given by them had a moral dimension as well.

The one recorded instance of use of the Urim and Thummim in the Bible takes place in 1 Samuel 14:41, where they are used to determine guilt or innocence. Saul decreed a fast (vs. 24) in which he called the anger of God down on anyone who ate before he defeated the Philistines in battle. His son Jonathan, in a moment of weakness, tasted honey. Saul’s rash oath caused God not to answer him when he requested further advice. So the Urim and the Thummim revealed Jonathan’s guilt, but Jonathan was somehow redeemed from the death sentence (vs. 45).

We can determine from all of this that one of the primary functions of the Urim and the Thummim literally was to bring guilt or innocence to light. One can see how this is relevant to the function of Jesus as our High Priest and eschatological Judge of the world. The faculty of judgment or discernment is also expected of Christians as members of this royal priesthood, as stated in 1 Corinthians 6:2, 3, where we are told that “the saints”—that is to say, those belonging to the church—will judge the world, and, ultimately, angels.

Consider This: The Urim and Thummim were recorded as rarely being used in the Old Testament world, and it’s easy to see how such a powerful item could have been misused or abused. But how can we seek God’s
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?

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?

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.
Learning Cycle CONTINUED

guidance and make His wisdom and discernment our own as we attempt to live Christian lives in the world?

STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: Use the following questions and exercises to help your students to understand what it means to be part of God’s royal priesthood in the world today.

Thought Question:
The priest’s major function was to be the representative of the human world before God—an intermediary. How did the ministry of the Aaronic priesthood mirror that of Christ? How was it different? Read Hebrews 7.

Application Question:
In the biblical descriptions of the priestly garments, much is made of the breastplate and the fact that it bore the representations—in the forms of gems—of the people of Israel, God’s people at the time. Thus, the priest held the people he ministered to, and for, literally on his heart. What does this say about the attitude we should have as we minister to people, whether as professional pastors, church officers, or concerned friends?

STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: God’s grace is a constant. The ways in which it is visibly manifested differ, at least superficially, from one time to another. In the Old Testament era, God dispensed grace and forgiveness of sin through the Aaronic priesthood. Inevitably, the accoutrements of this system may look alien to the contemporary observer. The following activities should help the class members to relate the rituals and regalia of the temple priesthood to the plan of salvation as seen in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ.

Construct a diorama, or draw a diagram, of the heavenly sanctuary (some help can be found at http://www.sdanet.org/atissue/books/27/27-23.htm). Annotate each item with an explanation of its meaning and how it relates to the larger salvation story.

Or:

Dress in authentic reproductions of priestly robes. You will have to have the garments available or make them yourself. These Are the Garments by C. W. Slemming would be a big help, available at http://www.amazon.com/These-Are-Garments-Priestly-Ancient/dp/0875088619. Don’t forget to explain the significance of each item of clothing.

“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 while 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. 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.
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).

Few 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 see what spiritual lessons we can draw from Elijah and the mantle he wore.

*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 to deep spiritual lows?

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?

It’s fascinating that although 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 from 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 Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** 2 Kings 2:9–14

**The Student Will:**

- **Know:** Examine the stories of Elijah, Elisha, and Ahab for symbolic relationships between clothing and responsibility and repentance.
- **Feel:** Sense the calling of the Spirit and the responsibility to be used of God that came with Elisha’s acceptance of Elijah’s mantle.
- **Do:** Respond faithfully and wholeheartedly to the call of God.

**Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Mantles and Robes

- A. What various attitudes were symbolized when Ahab and Elisha tore their robes?
- B. What did the sharing of Elijah’s mantle with Elisha symbolize in terms of job description, responsibility, and the role of the Holy Spirit in a prophet’s life?

II. Feel: The Calling

- A. The responsibility of leadership should not be taken lightly. How did Elisha demonstrate that he understood the high calling that the transfer of Elijah’s mantle symbolized?
- B. What emotions did Ahab demonstrate by tearing his robe? What did those feelings reveal about his character?

III. Do: Responding to the Call

- A. In what ways has God called us to service and leadership?
- B. What has He called us to do?
- C. How are we responding to His call?
- D. What should we ask for in order to carry out His call?

**Summary:** Tearing one’s robe in biblical times usually meant deep sorrow and grief. But in Elisha’s case, it seemed to symbolize not only deep emotion but also a major change in his life as he took on a role of serious responsibility in response to a call to work with God.
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?

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?

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 giving them by your actions? What have they come to symbolize to you, and why?**
Learning Cycle

**STEP 1—Motivate**

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Elijah’s prophetic gift and calling was symbolized by the mantle he wore, which was mentioned many times in the accounts given of his life in the Bible. The mantle can be seen to symbolize both God’s calling of His people to do His work and the protection and covering He will provide us as we do it.

**Just for Teachers:** Emphasize the example set by Elijah as someone who accepted God’s will for his life and undertook to represent God to the world to the best of his ability.

Why do people wear what they wear? As seen in the story of Adam and Eve, people in a fallen state feel the need to be covered just so they won’t be naked. The garments worn by our first parents—whatever else may be said about them—were decidedly utilitarian. But we’ve come a long way since then. In every society, different modes of clothing and ornamentation have evolved to indicate social status, gender, age, occupation, conformity to society’s norms, rebellion against those same norms, lifestyle, preferred form of entertainment or recreation, and so on. The one thing they all have in common is that they are statements about oneself: fashion statements. We make them even when we think we’re just throwing something on.

An ancient form of clothing was known as a mantle. A mantle was basically a coat or a cape, and the statement it made was that the one wearing it was either a person of temporal authority, such as a royal personage or a military leader, or someone of religious importance, such as a priest or prophet. Elijah wore a mantle to indicate the fact that he represented the highest authority. Most of us today don’t wear mantles unless we spend a lot of time at Renaissance fairs or historical re-enactments, but God still calls us to take up His spiritual mantle and represent Him to the world.

**Discuss With the Class:** Few of us (we’re assuming) are prophets in the way Elijah and others of his time and place were. How can we better represent God’s cause to the world? What can help us to be more attentive to the chances God gives us to serve under His authority?

**STEP 2—Explore**

**Just for Teachers:** Unlike many other prophets in the Old Testament, Elijah does not have a book wholly devoted to his writings and CONTINUED
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, Jezebel heard about it and 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 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?

When Ahab heard these words, he presented himself to the Lord in an exceedingly humble way (1 Kings 21:27), which included 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?
teachings. Yet he is perhaps one of the most significant figures of the prophetic era. Note this, and perhaps prompt your class to discuss why Elijah might be so important.

Bible Commentary

I. “The Sound of Silence . . .” (Review 1 Kings 19:5–19 with your class.)

The phrase translated as “still small voice” (vs. 12) in most English Bibles actually is better translated in the paradoxical phrase “the sound of sheer silence.” It is interesting to note that the conversation Elijah has with the still, small Voice is, word for word, the same conversation he had with the Lord in the cave several verses earlier. God asks him, rhetorically, what he is doing there, and Elijah tells Him. We can assume that Elijah’s account is just as rhetorical in intent, because he would have known that God was more aware of the situation than he was.

What exactly was Elijah trying to say in 1 Kings 19:10? It is clear from the context that he was boldly reproaching God. The subtext is, “Look how You repay me for my good and faithful service!” Elijah—who has just fled in abject terror from Jezebel, a mere human monarch—rediscovers his courage when the time comes to tell God off. God could have answered in kind, or He simply could have vaporized Elijah. Instead, He ignores Elijah’s self-pitying rant and tells him to watch for His passing.

As one might expect, Elijah then witnesses some impressive natural phenomena. A mighty wind, but it’s just wind. An earthquake, a big one. And out of nowhere, a huge wall of fire. But then Elijah meets the One who commands wind, earthquakes, and fire. He has a voice. And the Voice is a lot like . . . silence? God repeats His question and Elijah repeats his complaint, but it is likely that it sounds different, more humble; we do know that he hides his face in his mantle. Elijah knows that he is speaking to the Power that quietly commands nature and nations.

Consider This: Have you ever been angry at God or mystified by His seeming indifference? How can we know that God continues to care for us and watch over us even when to believe so goes against all the visible evidence?

II. Wear This, Not That (Review 2 Kings 2:12 with your class.)

Tearing of clothes in the Old Testament was, as we have learned, a sign of
The Taking of Elijah

Whatever one can say about Elijah, he certainly had an interesting and dramatic time of it (although, 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?

2. Why did Elisha tear his clothes here? Was it for mourning or something else? If so, what?

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 clothes 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. (Of what request does this remind you?) Elisha’s words reveal something of his character, showing that he was a successor worthy of wearing 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?
grief. It could be grief at events such as the death of a loved one, or it could be—as was the case with Ahab in 1 Kings 21:27—grief and repentance for one’s own actions that one now regrets and knows to be wrong. This gesture undoubtedly had more significance when clothing was all laboriously handmade, and no one except kings and nobles had closets full of clothes.

When we make a decision to serve God, or to, in a sense, take on God’s mantle, the decision is probably attended by grief at the things we have done before, possibly in ignorance. Even if we do not have a particularly evil past, we may still want to make a clean break with habits and patterns that marked our separation from—or ignorance of—God. Some of these things may seem extreme to those who know us. Perhaps we purge our CD collections or our clothes closets, or we find new forms of recreation and enjoyment. Or we may make decisions as we grow in our spiritual lives, disposing of things that weren’t necessarily bad in themselves but that hindered us as individuals in some way. Maybe we recognize that God has specific plans for us that require that we drop what we’re doing and start life over. This brings us to Elisha.

Elisha surely was terrified and dismayed by the thought of Elijah moving on, just as we might be when embarking on radical new phases of our lives. But at the same time, he wanted what Elijah was leaving with him, and he was prepared to serve God in this new way. It is interesting that the text says that he tore his old garment in two pieces, meaning that he could not put it back on, even if he so desired. He had no choice but to take the new garment—and role—that was offered to him.

Consider This: Why is it necessary to do anything and everything God asks in order to serve Him better and grow spiritually?

STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: Elijah was one of the more colorful, and even outlandish, figures in the Old Testament; and, yet, people of many different backgrounds and traditions continue to identify with him and his disciple Elisha. Emphasize to your class how Elijah’s struggles and triumphs in the life he dedicated to God mirror and provide an example for our own.

Thought Question:
What is the significance of God’s voice being still and small, or, literally,
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?

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?

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 although they had the words of Elisha telling them 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. But what happened as the experience itself started receding into the stream of time? Thus, why is it important that you, on a daily basis, do things that can help keep your faith strong?
“the sound of silence”? What does this tell us about God? Does God always communicate in a still, small voice? If not, why might He choose to do so on occasion?

Application Question:
Like all of us, Elijah had many different facets to his character. There was the Elijah who handily and confidently defeated the priests of Baal, and there was the Elijah who fled in abject terror from Jezebel’s secret police. Discuss a time when you felt like Elijah. When have you felt most confident in God’s leading? What can help you to remember these times when the way to God seems less clear?

STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: As one of the most honored and remembered prophets of the Old Testament, Elijah was someone who listened and spoke to God with an intimacy almost equal to that of the early patriarchs. Ultimately, he became one of only two human beings we know of in the Bible who escaped death and was taken to heaven before the general resurrection at the Second Coming. The following activities will emphasize the lessons we can learn from Elijah’s life and career.

Elijah heard the voice of God in silence or stillness. One suspects it was as much a surprise to him as to anyone. How long has it been since you’ve heard the sound of silence? Ask your class for one minute or more of silence, or at least not talking. You say nothing; they say nothing. Is it uncomfortable? Did you notice anything? Please note: We are not suggesting that you should meditate or listen for disembodied voices. The idea is to free yourself of customary distractions for a short segment of time and adopt an approach of listening rather than talking. In the coming week, ask class members to adopt an attitude of stillness or silence before beginning to talk to God in prayer. Have class members share the impact that silence or stillness has on their prayer life.

Or:

Elijah’s mantle, at some level, was just a coat. Ask your class to cite other examples of articles of clothing that became emblematic of a given idea, lifestyle, attitude, and so on, because of the person or people who wore them. Feel free to look at the worlds of politics, entertainment, and so on.

“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:

1. What practical things can we 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?

2. 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?

3. 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 be sure?

4. “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?

5. 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?
Lesson 7 *May 7–13

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 living 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 one of concealment after concealment in order 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, to what dangers does prosperity expose the soul? Why does adversity often draw us closer to God? How can we avoid prosperity’s pitfalls?
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** Psalm 63:7

**The Student Will:**
- **Know:** Use the metaphor of God’s wings to describe God’s protective and merciful power.
- **Feel:** Sense the depth of our vulnerability and impurity and our great need to find shelter in the shadow of God’s wings.
- **Do:** Confess our sins, repent, and seek God’s healing restoration through His provisions of grace.

**Learning Outline:**

I. **Know: The Shadow of His Wings**
   - A What are the various ways in which we need covering and protection under God’s wings?
   - B What strong visual and kinetic images of birds and their habits enrich this metaphor and extend our understanding of God?

II. **Feel: Our Vulnerability**
   - A In order to appreciate God’s wings fully, what do we need to realize about our great need? What happens when we refuse to acknowledge our sins?
   - B How did David feel that his sin affected his relationship to God? How did he describe his experience in the Psalms?
   - C How did he describe his feelings about God’s restorative actions on his behalf?

III. **Do: Steps to Confession**
   - A What steps do we need to take in order to confess humbly our sins, repent, and allow God to cleanse and restore us to the joy of a relationship with Him?
   - B How can we express our longing for God’s forgiveness, as David did?

**Summary:** When we humbly confess our sins, turn from them, and seek God’s restoring grace, we are hidden under God’s wings, safe and whole.
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 and its interpretation in 2 Samuel 12:1–12, 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 prostrates himself openly before God in repentance, pleading for his child’s life. How ironic that, a year earlier, under the cover of darkness, David prostrated himself in lust secretly 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 are we given by David’s bathing, garment change, and anointing? Why can we who have been washed clean by Jesus have full assurance that we may come worship Him?
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Repentance of our sins is a vital part of restoring our relationship with God and accepting the covering He offers “under His wings.”

Just for Teachers: Use care and sensitivity while prompting class members to recall a potentially negative life experience in the opening activity below. In leading the class, you should always focus on God’s forgiveness and restoration.

Opening Activity: Ask students to recall a time in their lives when a relationship was threatened by a misunderstanding. Ask them to remember how they felt when they realized that their action had risked the losing of trust in the relationship, and when they realized they needed to apologize. How did their feelings change after the apology was made and the relationship was restored, or at least had begun to be restored?

Because of sin, our relationship with God—our Creator—is similarly and seriously ruptured. How much more should we seek to confess and repent of our sin before God? Psalm 32 records David’s experience of repentance and how his relationship with God progressed from “groaning” (vs. 3, NIV) to “rejoicing” (vs. 11, NIV). David’s experience charts a course for us to follow.

STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

Just for Teachers: This section provides a focused review of the story of David’s sin, repentance, and forgiveness.

I. Confrontational Storytelling (Review 2 Samuel 12:1–12 with your class.)

Things had been going well for David. Better than well. After his years as a fugitive, he was now installed as the popular and powerful king in Jerusalem. God had blessed him, protected him, and fulfilled His promises to him. He was lionized by the people. His exploits were legendary, the stuff of songs, on the lips of women and children alike in the streets of
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?

David covers his sin of adultery with lies and bloodshed, 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?

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, are you deceiving God or only yourself in the end? Dwell on the implications of your answer.
Jerusalem. His enemies feared and admired him. He was wealthy from the spoils of war, and men were willing to lay down their lives for him at a moment’s notice. But David had a dark secret. We do not know whether it was known only to a few of David’s closest advisors or if it was the gossip all over the city, but David could barely bring himself to acknowledge his wrongdoing and tried to tell himself he could get away with it. After all, he was the most powerful man in the nation. His position would protect him, wouldn’t it?

Enter Nathan the prophet. Personal friend of the king for many years, he visits David, draws him in with a well-told story that confronts him with his sin and causes him to pronounce judgment on himself in a moment of self-damning irony. David is shattered, his credibility is destroyed, and, paradoxically, in the midst of this destruction, he is on the way to being forgiven and restored.

Consider This: What went wrong? Why do you think David fell so dramatically?

How do you think David might have reacted if Nathan had simply confronted him without telling the story? Why do you think Nathan chose to handle the situation the way he did?

II. A Song of Repentance (Review 2 Samuel 12:13 and Psalm 51 with your class.)

David responds to Nathan’s rebuke with a stark confession: “I have sinned against the Lord” (2 Sam. 12:13, NIV). It is a neat summary of Psalm 51. Yes, David sinned against Bathsheba, Uriah, David’s family, others who had been drawn into his plot, and the whole nation. But the primary relationship that had been broken and needed to be restored was with God. Healing of this relationship will be the basis for healing, where possible, the damage in other lives.

David was the political and spiritual leader of his nation. Most of us can only begin to imagine what it must have taken for him to accept the rebuke, to acknowledge his sin, and to humbly seek God’s forgiveness. Politically, he risked his hold on power. Spiritually, he risked his credibility. And personally, he had to surrender his pride. Of course, all of these things were already at risk because of what he had done, but by accepting the prophet’s message he was trusting the mercy and forgiveness of God to work through the colossal mess he had made.


**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 to 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 made 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.
Consider This: Which do you think carried the greater risk for David—to acknowledge his sin publicly or to continue to seek to cover it up? Why?

Do you think it right that David acknowledges only his sin “against the Lord”? Why or why not? What about the other people who were hurt by what he had done wrong? Based on the narrative, what kind of reparations need to be made to those we hurt?

III. Covered by His Wings (Review 2 Samuel 12:13–25 and Psalm 63:7 with your class.)

David ended his dramatic audience with Nathan with assurance that the Lord had taken away his sin (see 2 Sam. 12:13). It is an incredible note of certainty that we can all share, even in the midst of the consequences of our sin. The impact of David’s sin continued to play out in his family over the next few chapters in 2 Samuel, with the death of his infant son, the rape of his daughter Tamar, the murder of his son Amnon, and his son Absalom’s revolt against the throne.

Somehow, David lived through this aftermath, undoubtedly with regrets but also with the assurance that despite all the horror that had happened and that was yet to come, he was forgiven. He could rejoice, as he describes at the end of Psalm 32, and rejoice under the cover “of His wings,” as he described it in Psalm 63:7.

Consider This: Why did God punish David and his family by permitting his child to die?

How can we know the certainty of God’s forgiveness in our lives today, even when our circumstances may not give the appearance that we are forgiven and restored?

STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: The story of David’s sin and forgiveness raises some deep questions about the nature of forgiveness in general and of God’s forgiveness in particular. By prompting class members to think about forgiveness in their own lives, perhaps we can gain insight into how God forgives and how we might be able to practice forgiveness in our own lives.
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, and 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!


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, although 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?
Application Questions:

1. When should we be prepared to risk friendship by saying something difficult but important to a friend the way that Nathan did?

2. When you have been hurt, how hard is it to forgive the person who hurt you? Is it possible to fully restore the relationship to what it was before you were hurt? What else can be done to restore that relationship?

3. If God had really forgiven David, why did so many things still go wrong in his family and reign after this point? Shouldn’t God’s forgiveness make things right? Discuss your answer.

4. If our sin is truly covered, why does it continue to impact so many lives?

STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: The suggested activity should be conducted with sensitivity to the experience and circumstances of class members. Be careful to respect people’s privacy and appreciate that some of the activity might not be easy for some class members. The intention is to demonstrate the practical realities of repentance and forgiveness. Class members should appreciate that these are important components of our relationships with one another and even more so in the context of our relationship with God.

Individual Activity: Provide paper and pens or pencils and invite class members to write a letter to someone to whom they feel they should apologize. Some class members might not be prepared to deliver or post the letter but may still find the process of writing the letter to be useful and encouraging. If class members do wish to deliver their letters of apology, some may want to share responses received with the class in coming weeks.

When these letters have been composed, class members could spend additional time writing a similar letter to God, perhaps using Psalm 51 as a model, remembering that David’s first concern was that he had sinned against God.

“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:

1. As a class, discuss the futility of self-devised coverings compared with what Jesus willingly provides. What does He provide, and why is it the only covering for sin that can heal and save?

2. 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.

3. 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?

4. 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?
Garments of Splendor

SABBATH AFTERNOON


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).

Living amid the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, Isaiah preached for more than four tumultuous decades, during which time 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 of 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 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 of 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?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: Isaiah 61:10, 11

The Student Will:

Know: Compare the way earthly things (such as clothing) wear out, and contrast this transience with God’s glorious and eternal garments of salvation.

Feel: Delight in the splendid garments of praise, righteousness, and salvation.

Do: Daily accept and wear the robe of righteousness that God offers to us, and, as His priests, witness to others about the joys of salvation.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: Earthly and Heavenly Garments

A. What are the differences between the securities and joys offered by this world and those offered by God?
B. How are these differences illustrated by clothing?

II. Feel: The Joy of Bridegroom and Bride

A. What feelings accompany the garments of praise, righteousness, and salvation that God is so anxious for us to put on?
B. How are these feelings similar to those of a bridegroom and bride?

III. Do: Getting Dressed

A. However beautiful the robe offered to us, we actually have to wear it for it to do any good. What excuses do we often give that keep us from putting on Christ’s robe of righteousness?
B. What do we need to do to put on Christ’s robe of righteousness? How often do we need to do this?
C. What can we do to share with others the joy that salvation brings?

Summary: While all earthly coverings wear out, God’s splendid robes bring eternal joy, praise, and salvation. However, we must actually put God’s robe of salvation on in order to have the blessings He offers.
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?

“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?

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?
Learning Cycle

**STEP 1—Motivate**

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** The clothing we provide for ourselves is easily worn out and ruined, but the garments of salvation provided for us by God have a glory and splendor that will never fade.

**Just for Teachers:** Help your class members to grasp the significance of the wedding clothes and jewels as a metaphor for the splendor of Christ’s robe of righteousness by using some concrete examples and memories of weddings and wedding garments from their own lives.

**Opening Activity:** Display a few items that you, class members, or other friends have worn or carried at weddings. One or two may even be willing to model a wedding gown and/or share a few experiences that help illustrate the significance of wedding clothes or other wedding items. Discuss with your class why wedding clothes are so important. Often, these garments are very costly and are never worn again. Why do we invest such value in the wedding ceremony and the garments in which we are married? Why might Isaiah compare the robe of righteousness with wedding clothes?

**Alternative Activity:** Bring in some recent news items regarding environmental concerns, such as earthquakes and mudslides, as well as news items regarding pollution, government corruption, and other indicators of moral decay. Use items of worn-out clothing along with these news items to start a discussion, comparing our worn-out world with tattered clothing along the lines of the metaphor mentioned in Isaiah 51:6–8.

**Consider This:** Isaiah 51:9 contrasts the worn-out garments of which our world is made with the clothing of strength that God wears. What does God do about physical and moral weaknesses and decay? What plan does He have for us, caught as we are in a disintegrating world?

**STEP 2—Explore**

**Just for Teachers:** Help your class members to view the metaphors of clothing that Isaiah presents in the context of his work as a prophet of God in dangerous and troubled times: warning, pleading, and lifting up the Holy One of Israel as the only hope for a safe and happy future.
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?

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 metaphor 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 that 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 to 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?
Learning Cycle CONTINUED

Bible Commentary

I. Isaiah the Prophet (Review Isaiah 6:1–8 with your class.)

Isaiah’s ministry as a prophet began when he was young and lasted for 60 years or more during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. It most likely ended in violence during the early years of Manasseh (see Ellen G. White, Prophets and Kings, p. 382; 2 Kings 21:16). His name means “the Lord is salvation” or “the Lord is help,” and his writings over those many years pointed consistently to the Holy One of Israel, full of mercy and anxious to save, yet righteous and sure to bring judgment on the wicked.

Isaiah lived in a deeply troubled world of corruption and hypocrisy, where judges took bribes, and greedy rulers made unjust laws, took away the rights of the poor, and preyed on widows and orphans. There was widespread apostasy, and many who kept the form of true religion knew little of its meaning and power.

As Isaiah stood before the temple in Jerusalem pondering the futility of his work as messenger to his stubborn and unbelieving people, God gave him a vision. God opened the temple curtains into the Most Holy Place where even a prophet couldn’t enter, and Isaiah saw the Lord on a throne, high and lifted up, with glorious angels in attendance. With voices that shook the temple columns and gateways, the angels praised God for His holiness. Isaiah felt so unworthy and impure that he felt he would die, but a coal from the altar, carried to him by one of the angels, cleansed him. Now, when God called him to speak to His hard-hearted, blind, and deaf people, Isaiah could respond with confidence. “What though earthly powers should be arrayed against Judah? What though Isaiah should meet with opposition and resistance in his mission? He had seen the King, the Lord of hosts; he had heard the song of the seraphim, ‘The whole earth is full of his glory;’ and the prophet was nerved for the work before him. The memory of this vision was carried with him throughout his long and arduous mission.” —Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, vol. 5, p. 751.

Consider This: Discuss the similarities that exist between Isaiah’s time and our time. What similar challenges do workers for God face these days? Why was it so important for Isaiah to be morally pure before he continued his work?

Compare the vision that gave Isaiah confidence with the revelation God
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 ask, “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, saying 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 here? 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?

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 brought by sin.

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.
gave Job in Job 38–41. How was Job’s response similar to Isaiah’s? (See Job 42:1–6.) In neither revelation did God give answers. What did He offer instead, and why do you think He did so?

II. Garments That Last (Review Isaiah 51:6–8 and 61:3, 10 with your class.)

Isaiah was a talented poet whose consecration to God’s work, and his outfitting for his mission by the Holy Spirit, was evident even in his early writings. However, the maturity and prophetic insight that resulted from his long years in the ministry are reflected in his later chapters, and “constitute a masterpiece surpassing in depth of thought and majesty of expression.” —The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 4, p. 85.

Isaiah compares the power of God’s arm—flexed to deliver and clothed in strength—with the transience of the earth. In worn-out tatters, the earth totters on its last legs. Wicked men have their power eaten away like moths and worms in wool clothing. But when we return to God, we are given crowns of beauty and everlasting garments of salvation and praise. Because of God’s covering coat of salvation, we look like brides and bridegrooms, decked out in the glorious robes of a priest or a bride, arrayed in splendid jewels.

In contrast, Isaiah presents the Messiah with nothing in His appearance that is beautiful or majestic; instead, His form is disfigured and marred, beaten bloody for our sins. He is clothed in our filthy blemishes and the rags of our sinfulness, taking the punishment we deserve, so that we may wear the magnificent robes He deserves (Isa. 52:14–53:12).

Consider This: How do Isaiah’s metaphors and comparisons help us to visualize better what God’s salvation does for us? How do these terms help us to understand better Christ’s humiliation and what it means to have what belongs to Christ, rather than what we deserve?

STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: Help your class members examine how Isaiah’s experiences and metaphorical descriptions can transform their understanding of how God is working in their lives.

Life Application:

1. How have you matured in your Christian walk? How have your talents developed depth of expression, especially when revealing the insights
The Garments of Salvation

Some of the most famous texts in all of 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.

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 as “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?
of God? Or is this an experience only for prophets of God? Why or why not? How are you using the gifts God has given you to witness to the community and nations around you?

2 Isaiah received a vision that confirmed his call and gave him the strength to carry on his duties, despite the discouraging context of his life’s work. How do we find such assurance for our life’s calling? Do you have any similar examples that you can share with the class whereby God gave you affirmation and courage to work for Him?

3 Isaiah was cleansed with a coal from the altar before the call was extended, again, for him to work with a stubborn people. How are we fitted for our calling today?

4 Visualize yourself in God’s glorious and eternal robe of salvation, standing before the throne, praising Him for all He has done for you. Why is this robe something you may wear now? How is it possible for you to stand before His throne now, shining with the joy of deliverance?

★STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Offer these creative activities as opportunities to put what your class has learned into practice this week. You may choose to close your class with the hymn mentioned in activity 3 or with the responsive reading referred to in activity 4.

1 Visually represent the contrast between the disfigurement of Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane and on the cross with a couple in wedding-day splendor.

2 Celebrate the strength in which God’s delivering arm is clothed. Create a sculpture of His arm, with you in His palm.

3 Memorize the song “Lead Me to Calvary,” no. 317 in The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal, and use it in your devotionals as you meditate on what Christ took on Himself that we deserve so that we might have what He deserves.

4 Divide your class into two groups and recite together responsive reading no. 761, “Righteousness by Faith,” in The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal. Challenge your class to share this message with someone they know in the week ahead.

“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.”

**Discussion Questions:**

1. Dwell more on the theme found in the early chapter of Isaiah regarding forms of 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 worshipers 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 how a snowfall in New York City had created, miraculously, beautiful statues throughout the city. People were amazed. The whole city was transfixed. His main character was especially moved, and even quit his job so that he could do nothing but stare at the statues, which seemed to give 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 of the story 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 the way in which the things of this world so easily disappoint, and what have you learned from those experiences?
Lesson 9 *May 21–27

A Brand Plucked From the Fire

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 of them 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. Although you might not understand all the details and symbols, what message is the Lord 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?

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 with the assurance that if they would turn to God in humility and repentance, He would turn to them (Zechariah 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” (Zechariah 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 an impossibility.

Just before Zechariah’s vision of the filthy garments of Joshua, he received a message of promise that he was 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 Lesson in Brief

Key Text: Zechariah 3:1-7

The Student Will:
Know: Describe the following personages: Joshua, the accuser, the Angel of the Lord, and His attendants. Describe each of their roles in Zechariah 3 as they enact the drama of restoration.
Feel: Identify with the high priest Joshua’s feelings as he stands accused, in filthy clothing, and how he feels as he is clothed in clean garments.
Do: Accept the clean, priestly robes the Angel of the Lord provides, and walk in His ways.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: Filthy in Court
A. Where does Joshua the high priest find himself? How is he prepared to meet his accuser?
B. What does Joshua do to deserve his new clothing? What is he called to do after he is dressed in the clean garments provided by the Angel?

II. Feel: Clean, New Garments
A. How might we feel if we found ourselves in court in filthy garments, accused of all the sins we’ve ever committed?
B. How would we feel as our ruined clothing is discarded and we are dressed in God’s priestly garments?

III. Do: Dressed by God
A. What are we required to do in response to being plucked from the fire and having our filthy clothes removed and clean ones put on us?

Summary: The high priest Joshua finds himself in a court of judgment in filthy garments, accused of all his sins. His Judge, instead of passing sentence, removes his dirty clothing and re-dresses him in clean clothing, and then calls him to obedience.
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 are revealed here, especially in the context of the great controversy (and in the immediate context of the vision itself)?

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 of 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 that 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 contains 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).

While 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.
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Cleaning up sinful human beings is a work that God does through Jesus Christ and the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit. Humans can add nothing to this process, save surrendering wills.

**Just for Teachers:** If possible, print out pictures of the devastation left in the wake of the December 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami to share with your class as you relate the story below. The object of this illustration is to give students the scope of the challenge we face in righting our sinfulness.

According to the U.S. Geological Survey, on December 26, 2004, two shifting tectonic plates, deep below the Indian Ocean, produced a 600-mile (975-kilometer) rupture in the earth’s surface, displacing the sea floor both vertically and horizontally. The result was a 9.0 magnitude earthquake—the strongest in 40 years—under the Indian Ocean, near the western coast of the Indonesian island of Sumatra.

The violent earthquake displaced more than 1 trillion tons of water which were sent hurtling toward the coast of Sumatra with the speed of a jetliner. An inadequate warning system left Asia at the mercy of the tsunami. By the end of the day, more than 150,000 people had perished, and millions had been left homeless in the 11 countries hit by the ferocious waves.

What force can tame a natural disaster of that magnitude? Sin is equally as deadly and disastrous. And it is beyond human capability to stop it. Only God can hold back its destruction—or even reverse it.

**Consider This:** The tide of human sinfulness is not unlike that of a tsunami. What are some of the ways in which human beings attempt to address their own sinfulness? Do they work? Why or why not? What happens to the human heart with each failure? Do our failed efforts warp our view of God? If so, how?

STEP 2—Explore

**Bible Commentary**

I. Glimpses of the Past *(Review Zechariah 1, 2; 2 Kings 17:7–17; Deuteronomy 28:63 with your class.)*
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.

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 are we told by the reality of Joshua’s garments?

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 of 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.
Just for Teachers: The objective of this Bible commentary section is to look at the reality of Israel’s and Judah’s past misdeeds in the light of God’s willingness to reconcile with the small remnant charged with reconstructing the temple in Jerusalem. Zechariah raises Israel’s past in order to get the nation to focus on the bright future that now exists with God.

Sunday’s study supplies the predicate for God’s amazing act of love, foreshadowed by the Joshua vision of Zechariah 3. Zechariah reminds the Israelite remnant that God has been sorely displeased with their forebears, and that this has caused Him to chastise them, “for whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives” (Heb. 12:6, NKJV).

Zechariah’s brief mention of God’s displeasure doesn’t quite capture the extent of the sins that Israel and Judah had committed against God. They had “feared other gods” (2 Kings 17:7); “walked in the statutes of the nations whom the Lord had cast out” (vs. 8, NKJV); “set up for themselves sacred pillars and wooden images on every high hill and under every green tree” (vs. 10, NKJV); “burned incense on all the high places” (vs. 11, NKJV); and “served idols” (vs. 12). And when God sent them warnings through His prophets (vs. 13), they “stiffened their necks” against God (vs. 14, NKJV).

Consider This: Why was the rebuilding of the temple the first thing that God asked His people to do upon their return to Jerusalem? What does this tell us about the place that God should occupy in our lives? At the time of Zechariah’s visions, approximately 15 years had passed since the remnant had begun construction on the temple. What does this delay tell us about the human tendency to become distracted from God’s will? Can we accomplish anything without God? Why, or why not?

II. State of Delusion (Review Zechariah 3:1–3 and Romans 7:14–25 with your class.)

Just for Teachers: This brief discussion about the human tendency toward self-delusion is meant to explore some of the ways in which human beings avoid the true nature of their sinful condition. After discussing the steps of self-delusion, have someone read Romans 7:14–25 before completing the Consider This section.

A high priest standing in filthy garments is one of the most jarring images in all of Scripture; yet this is the picture we find in Zechariah 3. The sinfulness exemplified by Joshua’s filthy garments represents all humanity, as the
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?

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 this order of events so important?

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 with which he started.
lesson ably notes. There is a sense in this vision that Joshua understands the precarious nature of his condition—sinful, accurately accused, and standing in the presence of a sinless “Angel of the Lord,” whom we know to be Jesus Christ.

Joshua may understand his situation, but one can never underestimate the human tendency toward self-delusion. Most professionals who work in the field of addiction recovery know all too well the process of delusion that signals one’s descent into self-destruction.

First, the addict rationalizes his or her behavior. “What I’m doing is not that bad,” he or she reasons. “I can change when I’m ready.” Unknowingly, the addict progresses to step two: projection. In this phase, others become the source of the addict’s problem, and he or she will attack those closest, those who love him or her the most. “If they would just do XYZ, I would . . .”

A rapid descent occurs in the third step: repression. The inconsistencies in behavior are too much for the addict to rationalize, so he or she simply represses those memories. He or she puts them out of his or her mind and moves on with his or her life. Unknowingly, the addict’s inability to fix himself or herself leads him or her deeper into the behavior he or she wishes to change. Sacred values are tossed aside as torrents of shame, guilt, and confusion cover his or her life.

The fourth and final phase is altered memory. The addict begins to rewrite history, fabricating a past that allows him or her to feel better about his or her present.

**Consider This:** What does the apostle Paul’s description of the inner turmoil caused by our sinful nature tell us about the futility of deluding ourselves? What is the central problem bedeviling Paul? What hope does he cling to in his dilemma?

**STEP 3—Apply**

**Thought Questions:**

1. How can we tangibly experience the gift of salvation which is symbolized by the brand plucked from the fire in Zechariah 3:2? How can we have the assurance that we have indeed been saved? Is this act of salvation permanent? Explain.

2. Given what God has done for us in removing our iniquity—our willful missing of the mark—why do we continue to sin? How do
“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 the 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 this 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 to understand what we have been shown in Zechariah about what it means to be wearing “rich robes”?

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 in order 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 that we can live in obedience to God’s law. When we sin, we are choosing to sin. How important it is that we always think long and hard on the implications of that choice.

With what sins do you especially struggle? What promises can you claim so that you can have the victory over them through Christ?
we know that we are making progress in the journey to becoming Christlike? What word of warning does 1 Corinthians 10:12 give us?

**STEP 4—Create**

**Just for Teachers:** Share the following true story with your class and answer the questions, coming up with a list of practical responses that share some of the truths found in this week’s lesson.

Jason and Rose befriended each other in high school and soon became best friends. There was nothing romantic about their relationship. Jason was the brother that Rose always wanted. Rose was the funny girl who made Jason laugh uncontrollably. Jason was having major problems at home, so his friendship with Rose was a welcome escape.

As they got to know each other better, Rose became concerned about Jason’s dark mood swings. He even mused about killing himself on some occasions. As their relationship grew closer, he seemed to spiral out of control, speaking more openly about ending his “useless life.”

Rose talked him out of it most of the time, but one day she couldn’t. Years later, she still lives with the guilt of her inability to save Jason, her decision not to tell someone about what was happening to him. She blames herself for his death.

1. If Rose walked into your Sabbath School class today, what comfort would you give her? What comfort would you share from this week’s lesson?

2. How would you help Rose after the class is over, once she leaves your church and returns to her life?

“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?
Lesson 10  
*May 28–June 3

The Prodigal’s New Clothes

Sabbath Afternoon

Read for This Week’s Study:  

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, although 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, and his mangled corpse was 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.*

113
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 was 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?


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, receiving 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 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?

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?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: Luke 15:11–31

The Student Will:

Know: Discuss (1) the father’s response to the willful, prodigal son’s request to leave home, and (2) his response to the boy’s return in comparison to the response of his eldest son.

Feel: Absorb a sense of the compassion the Father shows the returning sinner, allowing it to open the wellsprings of your own heart.

Do: Love yourself and others with the forgiveness and compassion given to us by God.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: Forgiving Father

A. How does the father respond to his son’s request to take half the father’s wealth and leave home?

B. What is the father’s attitude toward his son while he is gone?

C. How does the father react to his son’s return? How does the elder brother react?

II. Feel: Open Heart

A. How does an appreciation of God’s openhearted response to repentant sinner (of whom we are prime examples) affect our attitudes toward ourselves and others who have fallen?

III. Do: Loving With God’s Love

A. What should we do in order to offer love and compassion to others, rather than the cold judgment of the older brother?

B. Whom do we know in our church or family who needs a warm, welcoming friend, and how can we be this friend?

Summary: The father gave his son the freedom of choice to leave home, but he kept a constant watch for his return. The father covered his son’s filth with his own rich robes and rejoiced over him as a son who had been dead but was now alive.
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 presented by the world.

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 exist in the verses that could give us the answer?

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? Although there’s no question that the terrible circumstances in which he found himself 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 regret 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?
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** The parable of the prodigal son illustrates an understanding of God’s merciful attitude toward His lost children. God not only eagerly accepts repentant sinners back to Him, but He also watches for them and will come meet them when they are yet far from “home,” clothing them in His forgiveness and love.

**Just for Teachers:** The parable of the prodigal son is the third parable in Luke 15. Jesus used these three parables to illustrate the three different types of the “lost.”

In the parable of the lost sheep, the one who is lost is unable to get back to the sheep pen without help. In the parable of the lost coin, the one who is lost is oblivious to the frantic searching—it is lost and is unaware of its state. In the parable of the prodigal son, however, the one who is lost not only knows that he is lost but also knows how to get back home.

**Opening Activity:** Use a small cardboard box to create a pigpen, or make one out of popsicle sticks. Cut several pig shapes out of pink paper or use sheets from a pink sticky pad to symbolize pigs.

Ask class members for suggestions as to the various sins that led the prodigal son to the pigpen. Write each sin on a pig and place it in the pigpen. Some of the sins might include greed, selfishness, rebellion, wastefulness, thoughtlessness, and foolishness. It won’t matter how many “sins” you put in the pigpen, but the more the better.

**Discuss:** Ask the class members to consider what is in their pigpen. Just as the father in this parable forgave all the sins that led his son to the pigpen, so our Father forgives us when we return to Him.

STEP 2—Explore

**Bible Commentary**

I. The Loss of the Prodigal *(Review Luke 15:11–32 with your class.)*

This loss is actually a mutual loss.

*God has lost a child.* John 3:16 tells us that the Father loves His children...
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?

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. However, just as the young man chose of his own free will to leave, he had to choose of 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 it is that we all pray for those who still haven’t learned the lesson the prodigal learned so painfully.
so much that the loss of His children is unbearable, and so Jesus was sent to
die in our stead.

*The child has lost his Father.* Sin separates us from God. Isaiah says as
much: “But your iniquities have separated you from your God” (*Isa. 59:2,*
*NIV*). In the parable of the prodigal, the son was lost through self-will. Self-
will causes us today to waste our lives on the things of this world, focusing
on the material at the expense of the spiritual.

**Consider This:** How is the actual “lost item” in this parable different
from the lost item in the parable of the lost sheep (*Luke 15:4–7*) and the
lost coin (*Luke 15:8–10*)?

**II. Reaping the Consequences of Sin**

Bankrolled by his father’s money, the prodigal son gave in to his lust for
pleasure and jumped headlong into a life of full-blown sin, squandering his
entire inheritance on (we can assume) fast living, booze, and prostitutes.
Now he was reaping the consequences. The consequences of the son’s sins
were many. His sins cost him not only his financial stability and comfortable
home but his dignity, self-respect, reputation, purity, and good conscience.

“A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature,
from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit,
from the Spirit will reap eternal life” (*Gal. 6:7, 8, NIV*).

Notice that when the son ran into trouble in that far-off country,
he sought help from “a citizen of that country” instead of seeking
help from his father. The “citizen” didn’t love him. The citizen
exploited him as cheap labor during an economic downturn, offering
him demeaning manual labor in a pigsty. Maybe the citizen was one
of the son’s “friends” who had benefited from the son’s profligate
spending. And when the money ran out, perhaps the son hoped this
“friend” would remember his generosity and all the good times for
which he fronted the money. It is more than possible that the citizen
even knew whose son this was. Perhaps the son even hoped to trade
in the commodity of his father’s name for a handout. But there was
famine in the land, and suddenly it didn’t matter who he was—or
who his father was. The son was left with a hard choice: sling slop
to a herd of swine or starve. And so the rich man’s son, born to a life
of ease and privilege, with servants to cater to his every need from
his childhood, finds himself eking out a hand-to-mouth existence
in a pigsty and bedding down with the swine at night. How quickly

CONTINUED
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 his 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.

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 and the robe that was placed on him couldn’t have been starker (notice, too, the father didn’t wait until he was cleaned up before throwing himself on him).

This shows, among other things, 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?
things in life can turn around, especially when we are doing what we know is wrong.

**Consider This:** In what ways do we look to the wrong sources for help? What can we do to shift our gaze to the right Source?

### III. The Journey Back Home

The journey home was made up of several preliminary steps. However, before the prodigal son could take even those steps, a catalyst was needed. Something had to combust internally in the son before he decided to return home. The Bible says that he came to his senses—another way of saying that he hit rock bottom. Or in his case, the filthy bottom of a pigsty.

At this emotional ground zero, he looked honestly at himself, taking stock of the differences between his current living situation and his life in his father’s house. How can we ever truly hope to go anywhere better unless we are able to look at ourselves honestly and see ourselves for who we truly are?

He admitted to himself that he had made a big mistake—a sin against heaven and his father. All too often, we do not realize a mistake unless the consequences are at the forefront of our lives.

Initially one could argue that his motives for going home were purely materialistic. He was thinking about what he could get. After all, he states that even the servants in his father’s house ate better than he was eating now. But something gradual but dramatic happened on the road home. The reasons that started him on the road home changed. By the time he got home, he saw himself not as an heir but as a servant. Indeed, he didn’t even feel worthy to be called his father’s son. As for the prodigal, so for us. Our reasons and motivations for coming to God alter, becoming selfless as we draw closer to Him in our journey home.

**Consider This:** Why is taking these preliminary steps necessary and crucial to coming back to our Father? What does the prodigal’s change in attitude about himself and his reasons for returning signal to us about the importance of humility in coming to the Father? Why is it that our attitudes and self-concepts change as we journey toward the Father? What is it about journeying in His direction that has the power to transform us?
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?

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?

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, each human being 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.
IV. Reunion With the Father

When the son was still far off in the distance, his father saw him. The father didn’t wait for the son to come all the way home. The father took off running toward his son.

The father’s actions in this story are a beautiful picture of how God welcomes us back into the fold. God doesn’t wait for us to come all the way—He comes to meet us as we are, where we are. Our slate is wiped totally clean. God doesn’t put us on probation when we come to Him with penitent hearts, sorrowing for our sins. The restitution is immediate. God instantly restores us to our place as His children. There are no questions, there is no guilt, there will be no “I told you so.”

Consider This: When you lose something valuable and then find it again, how do you feel? How might this be a tiny sliver of what God feels when a lost child returns? How should this inspire us to return to Him when we fall away?

►STEP 3—Apply

Thought/Application Questions:

1. The parable of the prodigal also illustrates for us that not everyone is happy to see the prodigal son repent and come home. What can we do to have the same attitude toward sinners that the father had toward his son?

2. At the end of the story, which son appears lost? Why?

3. How can we be more careful not to judge others as they come back to God?

►STEP 4—Create

Activity: Remind your class of the pigpen activity in the motivavate activity in step 1 of this lesson. Challenge them to take stock of what would be written on their pigs if the pigpen were their own and not the prodigal son’s.

“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:

1. Discuss further 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?

2. 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?

3. 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?
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 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 given them by Jesus?*

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. While 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 if they had they completely missed His point, but they hadn’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 Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** Matthew 22:1–14

**The Student Will:**

**Know:** Analyze how and why the story of the king’s wedding banquet includes aspects of the investigative judgment.

**Feel:** Discern the attitudes and emotions that lead to the rejection of the king’s invitation to the wedding banquet and the attitude of the king in response to this rejection.

**Do:** Accept the invitation to God’s wedding party and faithfully wear the robe provided.

**Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Judgment at the Wedding

A How does it happen that the story of God’s celebration of marriage also involves depictions of violence experienced by God’s messengers as well as by those who refuse to wear His garments?

B Who are the true celebrants at the wedding, and why?

II. Feel: Unwilling Guests

A The attitudes and emotions are strong and varied in this story, and we are going to experience a number of them, since we, too, are invited to this wedding banquet. With what attitude do we choose to approach the invitation God offers?

III. Do: Worthy to Be Chosen

A How should we react to the gift of the garment offered freely to us as guests at the wedding?

**Summary:** All are invited to the king’s wedding banquet, but not all accept the invitation. Among those who actually choose to show up at the feast, some choose not to wear the robe provided by the king: Christ’s robe of righteousness. It is not enough to accept the invitation; we must have the proper attire.
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?

Notice, too, how the king made all the preparations: he arranged for the marriage, he prepared the dinner, and he had the animals slain. Indeed, the message was “all things are ready: come unto the marriage.” In the end, all that the people had to do was accept what the king 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 this, 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?
Learning Cycle

**STEP 1—Motivate**

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Christ’s righteousness is the only “heaven-ready” garment offered to fallen humanity, and we must consciously put it on each day if we hope to dine with the King.

**Just for Teachers:** Share the following meditation on the idea of getting something for free, perhaps leading your class in a discussion of whether or not free giveaways affect their shopping habits. The objective of this opening piece is to get the class thinking about the power offered to us through God’s free gift of the garment of Christ’s righteousness.

Free. It’s the word that sends would-be shoppers into department stores where most of the merchandise is overpriced to start with. Give away one or two cheap items and charge a sheik’s ransom for the rest of your goods. “Free” delivers the visitors who then browse and buy other items at “sale” prices.

Consumers, to their credit, have gotten wise to the scheme, especially those who live their lives online. The online consumer wants everything—you guessed it—free. Business entities are beginning to cave to the pressure. If one company gives away its signature water bottle for free online, can competitors afford not to follow suit?

**Consider This:** God has offered fallen humanity a gift of epic proportions: Jesus’ death paid the price for our sins, while His sinless life covers our sinful lives. What is the attitude of most human beings to this extraordinary offer of grace? Why don’t more people accept this free offer?

**STEP 2—Explore**

**Bible Commentary**

I. A Gift Given *(Review Matthew 21, Genesis 12:1–3, and Exodus 19:1–5 with your class.)*

In Matthew 21, we see Jesus in rare form. From beginning to end, the message of the entire chapter can be summed up in verse 43, Jesus’ explanation of the parable of the wicked vinedressers: “Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it” *(NKJV).*
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. 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 came to the wedding feast? What does it mean that some who came were “both bad and good”?

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 may 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. How does this parable help us to understand how God will deal justly with them?
Learning Cycle continued

It was God who first called Abraham, their progenitor, with promises of mind-boggling blessings (Gen. 12:2, 3, NKJV). God reaffirmed this covenant at the giving of the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai (Exod. 19:1–5).

The nation of Israel was to be God’s special treasure, a nation of priests serving as God’s example of righteousness and blessing in a sinful world. But like the original invitees to the marriage supper (Matt. 22:3), many lightly esteemed the invitation, choosing instead to go their own way. Of course, many were faithful to Jesus, and these are the ones who formed the nucleus of the early church.

Consider This: According to Matthew 21, why did Israel cease to be God’s chosen people, His bride, garbed in the special wedding robe of His righteousness? Why did they reject this special garment from God? What parallels exist today in the behavior of ancient Israel and modern-day spiritual Israel?

II. Completely Covered (Review Matthew 22:8–10 and Colossians 2:9, 10 with your class.)

Tuesday’s study makes the powerful point that many professed Christians will look askance at the highway and hedge dwellers who gain entry to the king’s feast. But as the lesson notes, none of us are qualified to judge the entrants to the feast.

Furthermore, the king laid out the criteria for entry: come dressed in the garment provided. We should note here that nothing was left out of the garment. It was, in a word, complete: perfectly tailored to fit each guest. No matter their background or station in life, when the guests entered, they looked like they belonged, as though they were royal subjects. And, in truth, they were.

Colossians 2 states, “For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power” (vss. 9, 10, NKJV). This is the completeness that covers us when we put on the character of Christ. The covering offered by the king is no ordinary garment.

Consider This: The life of Jesus brings all God’s blessings in its train. How can we access God’s fullness each day?

III. A Righteousness of His Own (Review Matthew 22:11–14, 25:1–13 with your class.)

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

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 things, 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?
No matter how great God’s offer of grace, not everyone will choose to accept it. In fact, Jesus summed it up best when He declared, “‘Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it’” (Matt. 7:13, 14, NKJV). The “few” mentioned here, as noted in the lesson study, dovetail with the “few” who are chosen (Matt. 22:14).

One man came to the wedding feast without his garment. He failed to prepare for the event, although everything he needed was provided. This man represents professed Christians who choose to wear their own righteousness instead of Christ’s. But there’s more to Christ’s righteousness than just righteousness. Consider what the apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:30, “But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption” (NKJV).

Jesus is our righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.

**Consider This:** Define righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. Discuss whether there is any phase of our salvation that God has left up to us. How does this understanding change what it means to be covered in Christ’s righteousness?

**STEP 3—Apply**

**Thought Questions:**

1. Read Philippians 3:8, 9. According to these verses, what is the driving passion of Paul’s life? Are you passionate about being “in Christ”? What might be preventing you from abiding fully in Him?

2. In the parable of the wedding feast, the king examines—investigates—the man dressed in the wrong attire and pronounces judgment on him. Given that God is currently examining the record of all humanity in this great antitypical day of atonement, what should you be doing right now? How should you live?

**Application Questions:**

1. Read John 15:1–8. What counsel did Jesus give the disciples to help them stay spiritually vibrant and fruitful? What does it mean to abide in Christ?
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 who just claim 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?

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 who 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?
Learning Cycle CONTINUED

Examine your own spiritual walk with God. List three things that you can do in the coming week that would deepen your intimacy with Jesus Christ.

STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Below is a highly challenging quotation from Ellen G. White, written more than a hundred years ago. Share it and lead a discussion of the questions that follow. The objective of this exercise is to consider what motivated Ellen G. White to write the following critique of religious faith as practiced by some believers during the time of what is now known in history as the Great Awakening in the early to mid-nineteenth century:

“A profession of religion has become popular with the world. Rulers, politicians, lawyers, doctors, merchants, join the church as a means of securing the respect and confidence of society, and advancing their own worldly interests. Thus they seek to cover all their unrighteous transactions under a profession of Christianity. The various religious bodies, re-enforced by the wealth and influence of these baptized worldlings, make a still higher bid for popularity and patronage. Splendid churches, embellished in the most extravagant manner, are erected on popular avenues. The worshipers array themselves in costly and fashionable attire. A high salary is paid for a talented minister to entertain and attract the people. His sermons must not touch popular sins, but be made smooth and pleasing for fashionable ears. Thus fashionable sinners are enrolled on the church records, and fashionable sins are concealed under a pretense of godliness.”—The Great Controversy, p. 386.

Questions for Witnessing:

1 How relevant is this message today?

2 How should Christians respond to such practices? Are these issues best left for God to handle at the time of harvest (Matt. 13:30), or are Christians called to “cry aloud” and “spare not” (Isa. 58:1)? Give reasons for your answer.

3 How can you help those who are wearing the wrong garments to put on Christ’s righteousness?

“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. Think how people have used their faith as cover, a cloak, a justification for some horrific crimes. How does this unfortunate fact help us to 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 illustrate 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?

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.

*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 also came with the stigma of ritual uncleanness 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 practiced 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 that all she had to do was touch Jesus’ garment to find healing?

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?

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 had happened, and He probably wanted her, too, to know that it wasn’t any magical power contained 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 this woman did, in faith and submission, aware of our own helplessness? More important, how can we maintain faith and trust in Him when the healing that we ask for doesn’t come as we want it to?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: Psalm 22:16, 18

The Student Will:
Know: Examine the meaning associated with clothing in a variety of situations in which Jesus is involved.
Feel: Identify with the emotional context in which these stories take place and how these emotions highlight the human, yet divine, nature of Christ.
Do: Follow Christ’s example of humble, unselfish service.

Learning Outline:
I. Know: Vestments of Humanity
A What brought healing to the woman who touched Jesus’ garment?
B What unintended message did the high priest send when he tore his clothing after questioning Christ?

II. Feel: Man and Savior
A We cannot feel healing virtue leave us, but what emotions with which we can identify did Christ reveal when He healed the woman with the issue of blood?
B How must Jesus have felt when He was robed as a servant? When He was dressed in a royal robe and mocked? When He hung naked on the cross?

III. Do: Christ’s Humility
A In what ways can we imitate Christ’s example of humble service and sacrifice?
B Are there times when we are mocked and ridiculed? How should we respond?

Summary: Christ, as a man, wore clothing. Lack of clothing indicated a lower station, or humiliation, to which He submitted on our behalf. Although He was our Creator and King of the universe, He humbly bore the mocking and the insults of the high priest and the pagan soldiers.
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 be considered the greatest in the kingdom of 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 was wrong. In the midst of all this, when Jesus had every right to be disgusted with the whole lot of them, what did 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 servants’ 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?
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** While we are often quick to judge by appearances, the stories of Jesus challenge us to see the world in a different way. They challenge us to see God acting in ways we might not expect but in which He is in control, as is demonstrated by Bible prophecy.

**Just for Teachers:** We often judge people by how they are dressed. Perhaps we can tell some things about people and what they do, but we need to be careful in how we judge the value and heart of others by their outward appearance.

To explore this concept with the class, find a variety of photographs of people, perhaps from magazines or newspapers, and show these to class members, asking for their judgments. If possible, include photos that may lead class members to false assumptions, then tell them the real story behind each photo.

When considering the major players in the stories in this week’s Bible study, ask the following questions: How would we have judged them if we were to judge them by how they were dressed? How would we have assessed them? How would we view the woman who touched Jesus, or Jesus Himself when washing His disciples’ feet, compared with the priests and soldiers who had the appearance of power and prestige? God does not judge the outward appearance; instead, He looks into the heart. With our spiritual eyesight enlightened by the oil of grace, so should we.

STEP 2—Explore

**Just for Teachers:** The Bible study this week shares five snapshots from the life of Jesus. If the class is larger, divide class members into five groups and assign each group one of the stories to explore, imagining how the characters who experienced and witnessed these scenes would have felt and reacted in that moment. Have the subgroups report back on their answers to the questions. For smaller classes, choose one or two of these stories on which to focus.

CONTINUED
“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.

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 of 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 himself.

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?
Learning Cycle CONTINUED

Have copies of *The Desire of Ages* available for use by class members or, alternatively, copies of *Messiah*, the contemporary adaptation of *The Desire of Ages* by Jerry D. Thomas. (The chapter numbers are identical to those quoted from *The Desire of Ages*.)

Bible Commentary


**Consider This:** Choose one character in this story and imagine how they would have felt in this situation.

- **Was there healing power in Jesus’ clothes? Why was it important for the woman to touch the hem of Jesus’ garment?**

- **Why do you think Jesus did not let her just melt back into the crowd after she was healed?**

- **What do we learn about Jesus from this story?**

II. He Washed Their Feet *(Have the class review John 13:1–16. See also The Desire of Ages, chapter 71, “A Servant of Servants,” pp. 642–651.)*

**Consider This:** Choose one character in this story and imagine how he or she would have felt in this situation.

- **What does it mean that Jesus showed His disciples “the full extent of his love” by washing their feet (see John 13:1, NIV)?**

- **Why is it important for God’s people to follow Jesus’ example by washing each other’s feet? What kind of actions and service might the washing of feet also symbolize? How does it teach us to serve others?**

- **What do we learn about Jesus from this story?**

CONTINUED
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.

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, however, 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?
III. Tearing the High Priest’s Garments  
(Have the class review Matthew 26:59–68. See also The Desire of Ages, chapter 75, “Before Annas and the Court of Caiaphas,” pp. 698–715.)

**Consider This:** Choose one character in this story and imagine how he or she would have felt in this situation.

- Why did Jesus have such a difficult relationship with religious leaders?
- Does Jesus’ submission to this sham trial mean we should always be silent when faced with injustice? Explain.
- What do we learn about Jesus from this story?

IV. Mocking the King  

**Consider This:** Choose one character in this story and imagine how he or she would have felt in this situation.

- What did the different items in which Jesus was dressed symbolize?
- Why were the soldiers so concerned with humiliating Jesus in the way that they did?
- What do we learn about Jesus from this story?

V. Casting Lots for His Clothes  
(Have the class review John 19:23, 24 and Matthew 27:35. See also The Desire of Ages, chapter 78, “Calvary,” pp. 741–757, particularly pp. 746, 751.)

**Consider This:** Choose one character in this story and imagine how he or she would have felt in this situation.

- How often does God use people who do not know Him to fulfill His purposes in the world? Why do you think this is so?
- Reflect on the many prophecies that were fulfilled in Jesus’ life. What does their fulfillment mean to you?
- What do we learn about Jesus from this story?
“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 was 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?

Here is the greatest act in all of 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 provided 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?
Learning Cycle continued

STEP 3—Apply

Application Questions:

1. It seems we are always tempted to judge others by appearance. How can we learn not to do that and to treat people with respect, regardless of their appearance?

2. Consider Jesus’ relationship to power. While He was willing to be a servant and to humble Himself, He was oppressed, rejected, and ultimately killed by the religious and political powers of His day. How should we relate to powerful people and systems of today?

3. When we consider all the Old Testament prophecies that Jesus fulfilled in His life, why did so many religious people of His day not recognize Jesus for who He was? What should this tell us about our understanding of prophecy today?

STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: The stories from the life of Jesus provide important examples of how we can enter into the life God offers to us in practical ways. By acting these out in our various circumstances, we can come closer to Jesus and accept the gifts of hope and salvation He offers. We will also be able to serve and share love and hope with others.

Individual Activities: Jesus was abused, mocked, unjustly tried, tortured, and, ultimately, horribly killed. He endured this for the larger purpose of securing our salvation, but He also provides an example of patience, endurance, and long-suffering. Reflect back on a time in your life during which you experienced injustice, grief, pain, or other suffering. Write a journal entry, poem, or other reflection about how your faith in God and your knowledge of Jesus’ suffering helped you persevere, understand, or hope in difficult circumstances.

Group or Team Activities: Jesus said we should follow the example of what He had done for His disciples (see John 13:15). Plan to conduct a foot-washing ceremony for your Bible study class or for the following worship service.

Reflect on the story of what Jesus did for His disciples on that night. Retell the story, reading it in the Bible and The Desire of Ages, watching a filmed reenactment of this moment in Jesus’ life, or finding other ways to enter into the story.

Consider inviting community leaders and servicepeople to visit your church to wash their feet as part of thanking them for their contribution to your community (they will need to have the meaning of this ordinance explained to them in advance).

“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:
1. 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?

2. 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?

3. 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.
Clothed in Christ

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).

Have 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 in energy, decay, and move toward disorder? The answer is 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 continues in various ways 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 as “put on” comes from the word meaning “to be clothed.”)

In verse 27, Paul says that all those who have been baptized “have clothed yourselves with Christ” (NIV). Although 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 to understand what it means to be “clothed” in Christ?

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?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: Romans 13:14

The Student Will:

Know: Recognize what being “clothed in Christ” means in terms of our legal status before God, our daily spiritual life, and our future bodily state.

Feel: Long to be clothed in Christ as a daily necessity, dying in Him, living His life, and being transformed into His likeness.

Do: Put on the body of Christ, our minds and behavior transformed into God’s likeness.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: Legally, Morally, and Physically Changed

A. How does being “clothed in Christ” change us instantly, as well as over time?

B. When will Christ transform our mortal bodies into immortal ones?

C. What are the relationships between the metaphors of baptism, dying and being raised in Christ, and being clothed in Christ?

II. Feel: Longing to Be Clothed

A. How are our longings to be clothed in “our heavenly dwelling” (2 Cor. 5:4, NIV) fulfilled through Christ’s provisions, both now and when He comes again?

III. Do: In the Likeness of God

A. What must we do to put on the body of Christ?

B. What behavioral changes will be apparent in our lives as we live His life, rather than ours?

Summary: To be clothed in Christ means not only that God sees us as justified and righteous now, but that as we daily live Christ’s life instead of our own, we are daily remade into God’s likeness. Finally, when Jesus comes again, we will put on the glorious, new immortal body that He will provide for His redeemed.
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 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.

Most of the chapter deals with, in many ways, that which 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 obedience to the present political powers, and then he shifts to an emphasis on the “lateness” of the time. The idea being that, considering the times in which the Romans were living, 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 it means to “be clothed” in Christ, 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 if you were 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 if you made that complete surrender?
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: A relationship with God is not about mere information. It must be about transformation, which is an ongoing experience in the Christian’s life. The life of the Christian will be made complete only when the Christian is fully transformed at the Second Coming.

Just for Teachers: Be prepared to suggest, show, and share some of the examples of images and stories of transformation from your culture. Look especially for current stories in the news with which class members will be familiar and able to recognize. Possible examples include:
- Stories and folk tales—well-known folk tales such as Cinderella; stories of rebirth in mythologies of many cultures; before-and-after images used in advertising.
- TV programs or formats—reality TV makeover programs; game shows offering “life-changing” prizes; TV or movie dramas that retell the fairy-tale formulas.
- Social and sports heroes—the stories of the “overnight success” of entertainment stars; people who become instant heroes by a game-winning play for their sports team.

Ask class members what these stories have in common and why they think we are attracted to stories of transformation.

Opening Activity: Discuss images, symbols, and stories of transformation in your culture. These could come from mythical stories and fairy tales, television, or even the way heroes are created in our society, sometimes in a legendary moment in a sports or entertainment context. Share your thoughts about why so many of us are attracted to stories of transformation, whether in our traditional stories, current events, entertainment, or sports.

Discuss: How important is transformation to a good story, and why? If you were offered the opportunity to transform your life in one of the ways discussed above, what would you choose?
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 to link 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?

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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 for justification only, for Christ’s righteousness covering our sins and giving us a new legal standing before God. Being clothed in Christ means becoming 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 trust and ask for help in your attempts to better live out the principles taught in Scripture?
Learning Cycle CONTINUED

Bible Commentary

I. A Subversive Choice—a New Life (Review Romans 6:1–6 with your class.)

In A Peculiar People, Rodney Clapp refers to Paul’s description of “a new life begun” (see 2 Cor. 5:17) and describes baptism as an act of civil disobedience. The family, the nation, the market, the employer, the university, the advertiser, the retailer, the opinion-maker are “no longer the primary source of identity, support and growth” for the new believer. As such, Clapp argues, “baptism is profoundly subversive. Anytime the church takes baptism seriously, which is to say on its own terms, the surrounding society cannot help but see it as at least potentially politically threatening” (p. 100).

Clapp isn’t focused on “political” in the “politician” sense that we see in a capital city, election campaign, or media debate. Instead, he is highlighting the real sense whereby to say “Jesus is Lord” is also a powerful statement that everything and everyone else is not Lord. To choose baptism is to choose citizenship in a different kingdom—and a different kind of life.

Living out of step with the dominant society—creatively and with grace—is not necessarily easy. But that is the call of God, answered at the time of our own baptism and renewed with each baptism we share: “For we died and were buried with Christ by baptism. And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live new lives” (Rom. 6:4, NLT).

Consider This: What do you think of this view of baptism?

■ How important do you consider baptism to being transformed in Christ?

II. A Life Transformed (Review Romans 13 with your class.)

In his short novel, Life After God, Douglas Coupland has one of his characters reflect on the real need all of us have to be transformed: “My secret is that I need God—that I am sick and can no longer make it alone. I need God to help me give, because I no longer seem to be capable of giving; to help me be kind, as I no longer seem capable of kindness; to help me love, as I seem beyond being able to love.”—Page 359.

Life with God must make a difference to our lives, priorities, and actions—and we need Him to make that difference in our lives.
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.”

In verses 53 and 54, the verb (often translated “clothed”) is the same one we’ve already seen. Here, however, 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 offer, in any conceivable manner, that would make it worth losing the promise revealed here?
Too often, evangelism has focused only on getting people to the point of decision and baptism. But Jesus instructed that we were to make disciples (see Matt. 28:20). Discipleship and spiritual transformation must be an ongoing part of our faith experience. Spiritual practices are part of our continuing growth in Christ.

Consider This: In what aspect of your life do you particularly feel your need for God, and why?

- What are some of the spiritual practices that can aid our continued spiritual transformation?

III. The Ultimate Transformation (Review 1 Corinthians 15:49–55 with your class.)

Jesus saves us in the moment that we accept what He did for us by His death. We do not have to achieve a certain level of behavior to claim that gift (consider the story of the thief on the cross in Luke 23:40–43). But God does not leave us where He finds us. He promises that we will be changed—transformed—and that, ultimately, we will be given a completely new and eternal kind of life when He returns.

Paul bases his excitement about this ultimate transformation on the assurance of Jesus’ resurrection. If Jesus was raised to a new kind of life—and He was, Paul urges—we will be too. Looking forward, Paul anticipated the time when we will all share in that same newness of life completely and eternally: “We will all be transformed! It will happen in a moment, in the blink of an eye, when the last trumpet is blown” (1 Cor. 15:51, 52, NLT).

Consider This: How can we be assured of salvation today?

- How does God’s promise to transform us “in the blink of an eye” at the Second Coming change your attitude toward life?

STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: Our experience of transformation is not just a spiritual thing, it is linked to specific occasions, events, decisions, and practices in our lives. Among others, baptism is one significant milestone event. Reminding ourselves of that time in our lives is valuable in reaffirming our commitments and refocusing on our need for continued
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?

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), which speaks 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?

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 a few 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, all of these metaphors 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 of 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.
transformation. Sharing these stories with others can be similarly faith affirming. Invite class members to share their stories, but in a way that is sensitive to those in the class who may not yet be baptized.

**Activity:** Remember your baptism: What was the experience that led to that choice? Where and when were you baptized? What were the circumstances in which you were baptized? How has your Christian experience grown and continued to be transformed since that time? Share this story with other class members, even sharing photos of the event, if available. When as many class members as possible have shared their stories, pray together, affirming those decisions and commitments made at earlier times in their respective lives.

**Thought Questions:**

1. How would you explain to a non-Christian friend the idea of “transformation” as discussed in this week’s study?
2. How do you measure your own spiritual growth?
3. By anticipating our ultimate transformation at the Second Coming, do we conclude that because we will not attain “perfection” until that time, it is not worth focusing on spiritual practices? Why or why not? How do we balance striving to live faithfully with recognizing our present and ongoing human shortcomings?

**STEP 4—Create**

**Just for Teachers:** Transformation is something we experience in small ways every day and something we can share with others; but these are just glimpses of the transformation God offers us. We should look for ways to recognize this kind of transformation in our daily lives, and seek ways to share this intentionally with others in our communities.

**Individual Activities:** Try to describe to a friend, verbally or in writing, the feelings you experience in one or more of the following situations:

1. **After a day of work when you bathe and put on clean clothing:** How do you describe the feeling of being renewed and refreshed?
2. **When you notice spring begin to change the natural environment around you:** What does it mean to see the world around us being transformed in this way?

“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 to 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? Although 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 to live as you know you should? Also, how can we help each other, as a community, to live out the biblical ideals presented before us?