

Contents

1	In the Loom of Heaven—March 26–April 1 —————	6
2	From Exalted to Cast Down—April 2–8 —————	14
3	A Garment of Innocence—April 9–15 —————	22
4	The Coat of Different Colors—April 16–22 —————	30
5	The Priestly Garments of Grace—April 23–29 —————	38
6	Elijah’s and Elisha’s Mantle—April 30–May 6 —————	46
7	In the Shadow of His Wings—May 7–13 —————	56
8	Garments of Splendor—May 14–20 —————	64
9	A Brand Plucked From the Fire—May 21–27 —————	72
10	The Prodigal’s New Clothes—May 28–June 3 —————	80
11	The Wedding Garment—June 4–10 —————	88
12	More Clothing Imagery—June 11–17 —————	96
13	Clothed in Christ—June 18–24 —————	104

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A THING BIGGER THAN ITSELF

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 can be what they stand in for. The word *dog*, in every tongue and script, represents something bigger than itself.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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