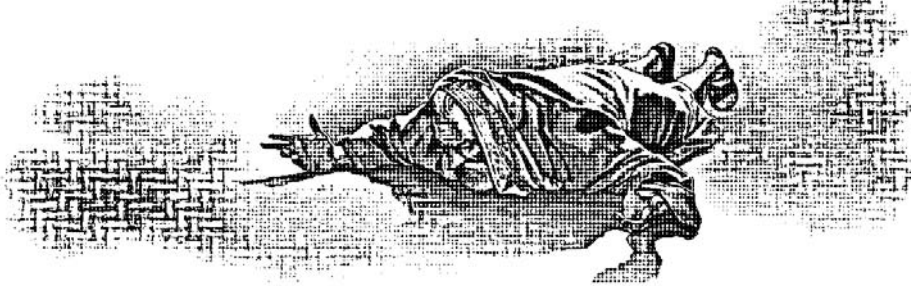


A Brand (Stick) Plucked (Taken, Rescued) From the Fire



SABBATH—MAY 21

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Zechariah 1–3; Revelation 12:10; Exodus 3:2–14; Ephesians 2:8–10; John 14:15.

MEMORY VERSE: “I have taken your sin away. I will put fine clothes on you” (Zechariah 3:4, NlrV).

WE MUST NOT FORGET THAT THE GREAT CONTROVERSY (WAR) BETWEEN CHRIST AND SATAN IS VERY REAL IN OUR LIVES. Wars, crime, riots, rebellions (uprisings), and human suffering are just visible (things that can be seen) examples of the great war that began in heaven (Revelation 12:7). This great struggle touches upon all creation (Romans 8:20–22).

We also must never forget that the great controversy is not over Middle East oil or over geographic, political, and economic changes in the world. It is over the salvation of the human race, one soul at a time. Nations come and go. Governments come and go. Grand themes of history and philosophy (study of truth) come and go. Only those people who are covered by the robe of Christ's righteousness will last forever. Satan does not care about money, power, or politics. He cares only about taking as many souls down to ruin with him as possible. Through His death, Christ has made it possible to save everyone from that ruin. The important issue of the great controversy is people choosing eternal ruin or eternal life. Nothing else in this life is as important.

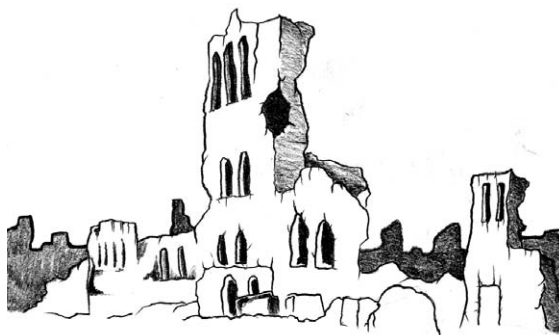
SUNDAY—MAY 22**EAGER FOR JERUSALEM
(Zechariah 1; Zechariah 2)**

Read Zechariah 1 and 2. You might not understand all the details and symbols in these two chapters. But what is the message the Lord is giving to His people here? What is the background to these events? What clear Bible principles (important rules) do we find 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 shown to us today?

Jerusalem lay in ruins because Babylon defeated it 70 years earlier. But God gave hope for the future of the city. Zechariah received the message from the Lord that both the temple and Jerusalem would be rebuilt.

Zechariah began by telling his listeners that the Lord had not been very pleased with the leaders of Jerusalem. But Zechariah gave courage to those who were listening. Zechariah told them that if they would turn to God in repentance,¹ He would turn to them (Zechariah 1:1–3). Zechariah’s visions were meant to give people the strength and inspiration needed to continue the building of the temple in Jerusalem for the worship of God.

The first vision of Zechariah was given in chapter 1. In this vision the



After Babylon defeated Jerusalem, the city lay in ruins.

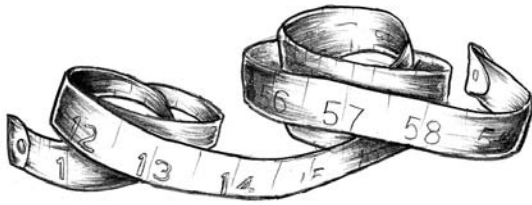
Lord gave some wonderful encouragement. The Lord said, “I am very jealous for [hold dear] my people in Jerusalem and Zion” (verse 14, Nlrv).

And then, this: “ ‘So the Lord says, “I will return to Jerusalem. I will show its people my tender [gentle] love. My temple will be rebuilt there. Workers will use a measuring line when they rebuild Jerusalem,” announces the Lord’ ” (Zechariah 1:16, Nlrv).

The measuring line symbolizes (stands for) 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 impossible.

Zechariah also received and gave another message of promise to the Jews in Zechariah 2:10–13. God told them to “shout and be glad” (Nlrv). Then He promised to live with them. How encouraging that message must have been as the people of God tried to join together to worship Him.

1. repentance—the act of feeling sorry for your sins and turning away from sinning with the help of the Holy Spirit.



The measuring line symbolized the plans for the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem and the temple.

MONDAY—MAY 23

THE ACCUSER (SATAN) AND THE ACCUSED (SINNER) (Zechariah 3:1)

What important truths do we find in Zechariah 3:1? Keep in mind the great controversy and the vision itself.

A few important points are shown here. First, Joshua is the high priest. He stands as a representative of all God's people. In this vision Joshua as a priest is facing the Lord. He represents Israel in all their faults (weaknesses) and sins. There is no question: the people are not innocent. They are not sinless. They do not deserve the promise of being restored (made new) that the Lord is offering them. But they claim this promise for themselves by faith and repentance.

And, of course, Satan is there to accuse (bring charges against) the people. He is arguing against their repentance, their desire to change for the good, and their desire to find the mercy and grace (favor) of God. What better way to discourage people in the great controversy (war) than to make them think their sins are just too ter-

rible for the Lord to forgive? All through history, many souls have fallen into this trap. What makes the threat so powerful is that Satan does not have to lie about our sins. All Satan has to do is remind us of our sins. If we did not know about God's grace, we could be crushed with hopelessness and loss. Even without Satan's "help," our sins are more than enough to make us guilty.

The Hebrew word for "accuse" comes from the same word as "Satan"; the same three Hebrew letters form both words. There is no doubt, Satan is the accuser. But we all should know the famous verse: "Then I heard a loud voice in heaven. It said, 'Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God have come. The authority of his Christ has come. Satan, who brings charges against our brothers and sisters, has been thrown down. He brings charges against them before our God day and night' " (Revelation 12:10, NIV).

It is not good to think about our sins. But sometimes we need to take a hard and honest look at ourselves. What changes must you choose to make in your life? And what Bible promises can you claim in order to make those promises work well? Think of what you may lose if you let sin control you.

TUESDAY—MAY 24

THE ANGEL OF THE LORD (Zechariah 3:1–3)

So far, in Zechariah 3, we have

talked about two persons, Satan and the high priest Joshua. But there is a third person. He is clearly the most important person in the story: “the Angel of the Lord.”

Who is “the Angel of the Lord”? Read also Exodus 3:2–14; Zechariah 3:1, 2.

Here in Zechariah we find a very clear picture of the great controversy. This battle is fought for every repenting (sorrowing) soul who has given his or her life into the hands of Jesus, the Lord. Remember the theme: Israel “humbled [repented]² themselves before God, and returned to Him.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Testimonies [Messages] for the Church*, volume 5, page 468. At this time Satan’s work as the accuser (blamer) was made known. What did he exactly say? We do not know. But from what we know about human nature³ from Bible history, it probably was not a pretty picture.

According to Zechariah 3:1–3, what do Joshua’s garments (clothes) tell us?

As the high priest, Joshua was judged to be wearing dirty garments. This shows how deep sin was. From the earliest days of the covenant (agreement) between God and Israel, all priests were very special, even among the chosen nation. The Lord called them out for a holy and special work (Exodus 38:21; Numbers 1:47–53;

Numbers 3:12). Of all Israel, the priests as symbols should have been clothed in the cleanest of garments.

The rest of the chapter makes it clear that we are all sinners with weaknesses. But “the Angel of the Lord” is there to defend us against the charges of Satan. It does not matter how true or false those charges are. “The Angel of the Lord,” Jesus, is always there to save us. This has to be the most important truth in the whole Bible.

No matter how unworthy we are, we must never forget that “the Angel of the Lord” is on our side. How can we always remember this truth without misunderstanding it or having false ideas about it? What might some of those false ideas be? Be prepared to discuss your answer in class on Sabbath.



Joshua the high priest is clothed in dirty garments.

2. repented—to have felt great sorrow over having sinned and to want to stop sinning.

3. nature—the particular aspect or quality of something that makes the thing what it is; the heart and mind.

WEDNESDAY—MAY 25**CHANGE OF CLOTHES
(Zechariah 3)**

Read prayerfully and carefully all of Zechariah 3. Notice the steps taken. This is how God saves His people even though they are sinners. What can Zechariah’s vision teach us about the plan of salvation?

In verses 3–5, before the new clothes are put on Joshua, the old filthy (dirty) ones are removed. That means that the Lord has “taken your sin away” (verse 4, NIV). What does that mean in the life of the person saved? Was Joshua now sinless? Was Joshua perfect in heart and soul and mind, never to fall or sin again? Was that the condition Joshua had to reach before the change of garments could be put on him? If so, what hope would any of us have?

Instead, it means that his guilt had been taken away. Ellen White said: “Joshua’s own sins and those of his people were pardoned. Israel was clothed with a ‘change of robe.’ The robe represents the righteousness [holy life] of Christ credited to them. The miter [turban; cap] put upon Joshua’s head was the same kind worn by the priests. It carried the words, ‘Holiness to the Lord.’ This showed that, in spite of Joshua’s past sins, he now had the ability to minister [serve] before God in His sanctuary.”⁴—Adapted from Ellen G.

White, *Testimonies [Messages] for the Church*, volume 5, page 469.

What does “the Angel of the Lord” say to Joshua in verse 7 after the change of clothes? Why is that order so important?

First, the special clothing was given to Joshua. Then he received the warning to obey the Lord and walk in His ways. We must not overlook this point: the righteousness of Christ was given to Joshua by faith. It was credited to him apart from his walking in “My ways” or from keeping “My command.” Those commandments came next. If they had come first, then the robe of Christ’s righteousness would have been of no use or value. Unless he was covered in those “rich robes” (Zechariah 3:4, NKJV), all of Joshua’s efforts would have left him in nothing but the same filthy garments with which he started.



Joshua’s old garments are removed and clean garments are put on him in order to symbolize the forgiveness of his sins.

4. sanctuary—the place in heaven where Jesus works as our High Priest before the throne of God.

THURSDAY—MAY 26**“A PLEA THAT WORKS”
(Ephesians 2:8–10)**

In the world of Christianity, many people have not experienced the robe of righteousness. They do not understand how it really works. But this idea is very important to anyone who wishes peace and joy in his or her relationship with the Lord.

Too often we do good so that “we can be saved.” The message here in Zechariah should show us that is not how it works. And it is not how it can work either. Again, here is Ellen G. White on what was happening in this vision:

“We should understand how sinful our condition is. But we also are to depend upon Christ as our righteousness, our holiness, and our salvation. We cannot answer the charges of Satan against us. Only Christ alone can make a plea that works for us. Jesus is able to silence the accuser [Satan] with arguments. These are the arguments based on His goodness, not on ours.”—Adapted from *Testimonies for the Church*, volume 5, page 472.

Those last two sentences should shine brightly in the hearts of all of God’s people. We must know this truth in our minds. We must experience this truth in our lives. We must learn to depend only on Christ’s goodness and not on our own. It is just as David said: “Blessed is the one whose lawless acts [sins] are

forgiven. His sins have been taken away” (Psalm 32:1, NIV).

With Zechariah 3 in mind, read Ephesians 2:8–10; John 14:15; and Romans 6:1–4. How do these verses help us understand what Zechariah means when he speaks about wearing “rich robes”?

Now Joshua was covered in the garments of holiness. His life had to show that holiness. We are to make use of all the power that God has given to the soul to have victory over sin. No sin should be accepted or excused in our lives. This is especially true when there are so many promises of victory for the one who has given himself or herself to Christ. Christ’s life proved 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 about what that choice means.

What are the sins that you struggle against? What promises can you claim so that you can have the victory Christ promised?

FRIDAY—MAY 27

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Read Ellen G. White Comments, pages 1092, 1093, in *The SDA Bible Commentary*, volume 4; “Joshua and the Angel,” pages 582–592, in *Prophets [Special Messengers] and Kings*; “Shall Not God Avenge His Own?” pages 169, 170, in *Christ’s Object Lessons*; “Joshua and the

Angel,” pages 467–476, in *Testimonies for the Church*, volume 5.

“Satan tries to cover the people of God with blackness and ruin them. But Christ acts in their behalf. God’s people have sinned, but Christ has taken the guilt of their sins upon His own soul. Jesus has rescued humans as a brand [stick] from the fire. By His human nature Jesus is connected with man. But through His divine [holy] nature He is one with the eternal God. Help is brought within the reach of dying souls. Satan, the enemy, is defeated. . . . God’s people have weaknesses. But Christ does not turn away from the people under His care. He has the power to change their clothes. He removes the filthy garments, He puts His robe of righteousness upon the repenting,⁵ believing souls. He also writes pardon next to their names on the records of heaven.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pages 169, 170.

“With their repenting souls, the people of God plead for purity of heart. At the same time God’s command is given, ‘Take his [Joshua’s] dirty clothes off,’ and the encouraging words are spoken, ‘I have taken your

sin away. I will put fine clothes on you.’ Zechariah 3:4, NIV. The spotless robe of Christ’s righteousness is put upon the suffering, tempted, faithful children of God. God’s people are clothed in glorious clothes. They will nevermore be stained by the sins of the world.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, page 591.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① As a class, go over your answer to Tuesday’s final questions.
- ② Think more deeply about the fact that it was only after the change of garments that Joshua was given the command to obey. Why is this so important to remember? What does this tell us about our salvation? Why is it not based on the results of our works? Why must we always understand that important difference?
- ③ Think of the good news: no matter how filthy our garments have been, we can be given a whole new change of clothes. What should that mean to you in your own life, your own feelings, your whole way of looking at the world and others?

5. repenting—feeling sorry for sin.