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## A THING BIGGER THAN ITSELF

**W**e 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

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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
4. What can I do with what I’ve learned from God’s Word? (Create).

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.