

Garments of Splendor



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Isaiah 1–5; 6:1–8; 51:6–8, 61; Luke 4:16–20.*

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?

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.

CONTINUED ►

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*

CONTINUED 

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.

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

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

CONTINUED ►

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?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

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.

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “Lost, and Is Found,” pp. 206, 210, in *Christ’s Object Lessons*; “Instructed in the Law of God,” p. 668, in *Prophets and Kings*; “Calvary,” p. 754, in *The Desire of Ages*; “A Work of Reform,” p. 460, in *The Great Controversy*.

“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.”
—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 88.

Discussion Questions:

❶ 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 worshipping? Discuss.

❷ 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?

❸ 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?