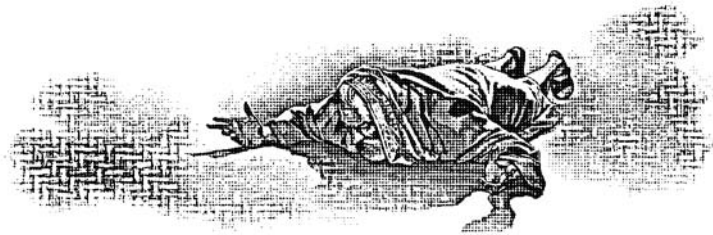


# A Brand Plucked *From the Fire*




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## 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?

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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 (*Zech. 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’ ” (*Zech. 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)?**

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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.**

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## *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.*)

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## 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*.

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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?

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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.**

*Learning Cycle* CONTINUED

**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

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## 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?

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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?

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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.



*Learning Cycle* CONTINUED

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

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## “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”?

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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?**

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Learning Cycle CONTINUED

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?

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

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**Further Study:** Read Ellen G. White Comments, pp. 1092, 1093, in *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4; “Joshua and the Angel,” pp. 582–592, in *Prophets and Kings*; “Shall Not God Avenge His Own?” pp. 169, 170, in *Christ’s Object Lessons*; “Joshua and the Angel,” pp. 467–476, in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5.

“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:

- ❶ As a class, go over your answers to Tuesday’s final questions.
- ❷ 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?
- ❸ 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?