

Garments of Grace: Clothing Imagery in the Bible

Lesson 6: "Elijah's and Elisha's Mantle"

The greatest drought in the history of ancient Israel prevailed in the reign of King Ahab and Queen Jezebel. No rain, not even a drop of dew, fell on the parched land for three and a half years; people were dying everywhere in consequence of the national disaster.

Likewise, a crisis faces the Lord's church in the last days if there is no "rain" of the Holy Spirit falling upon it worldwide in copious showers of grace. As many Israelites died in Ahab's days of drought, so many in modern Israel suffer; lacking Heaven's true showers of "rain" they fall prey to the clever counterfeits that the Enemy in the great controversy with Christ foists upon them. Youth and teens especially perish spiritually if they are deprived of fresh "bread of life." Every wind of doctrine is blowing.

What ancient Israel had prayed for centuries was the fulfillment of their messianic prophecies. The purpose for their existence as a people hinged on the coming of the Messiah promised to their father Abraham. When Jesus was born in the manger of Bethlehem there were few who hailed his arrival, it went largely unnoticed.

The equivalent of ancient Israel's Messiah for modern Israel is the outpouring of the latter rain consistent with the loud cry of the third angel's message. This is the climax of Seventh-day Adventists' purpose for existence in order to mature the grain for harvest and empower her to play a role in enlightening every soul on earth with God's good news (Rev. 18:1). The prayers of God's people have implored Him for this gift now for well over 167 years. Do we have the mantle of Elijah to recognize the Spirit when He speaks to us in a still small voice?

The "mantle" represents the Spirit and the message of Elijah (2 Kings 2:8-15). "Henceforth Elisha stood in the place of Elijah." [1] "When the Lord in His providence sees fit to remove from His work those to whom He has given wisdom, He helps and strengthens their successors. ... They may be even wiser than their predecessors." [2]

The message of Elijah was to turn "their [Israel's] heart back again" (1 Kings 18:37). By absorbing a counterfeit Baal worship from the nations around them ancient Israel's hearts were alienated from God. Baal is the worship of self disguised as the worship of Christ. It took about 100 years for such apostasy to break down the societal and family relationships of Israel both ancient and modern (Mal. 4:6).

When Elijah focused the attention of the people upon the altar and "the fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice," "all the people saw it" and "they fell on their faces: and they said, The LORD, he is the God" (1 Kings 18:38, 39). Israel as a corporate body received the gift of repentance by turning from Baal to "the Lord." Elijah proclaimed the Spirit-indited message of the cross and it prostrated the people in their identification with the Crucified One.

The latter rain came as dew accompanying the Elijah message ("loud cry"), and following quickly on its heels was "a sound of abundance of rain" (vs. 41).

The Holy Spirit had wrought a signal victory for Israel on Mt. Carmel, but Elijah didn't stay around very long to follow up and strengthen the people with good news. He fled his post of duty for fear of the consequences from Jezebel.

The same Holy Spirit spoke "the word of the Lord" to Elijah on his self-imposed exile at the cave by asking him, "What doest thou here?" (1 Kings 19:9). Though Elijah had fled Israel out of self-preservation--"they seek my life,"--he still understood properly his message: "I have been very jealous for the LORD" (vs. 10). He was concerned for the Lord who had staked His reputation on Israel through whom He had promised the "Seed."

But the Lord wasn't finished with Elijah. He took him to Mt. Sinai and re-commissioned him as a "remnant" within Israel with a message. Someone, even if only one, must keep hope alive for the Promised One. Elijah must pass the test of faith (gold tried in the fire) that is motivated by an appreciation of God's love.

And so there were cyclonic winds enough to move rocks the size of houses. There was an epic earthquake. There was an all-consuming fire. None of these tumults moved Elijah. "The LORD passed by" and Elijah had the assurance of God's presence (vs. 11).

That which induced Elijah's awe and respect, was "a still small voice" of the Holy Spirit (vss. 12, 13). "It is the still, small voice of the Spirit of God that has the power to convict and convert men's souls." [3] It was this voice that spoke such penetrating truth to the soul of Elijah which caused him to wrap his face in reverence with "his mantle." "What doest thou here, Elijah?" (vs. 13). Did I send you here?

The Elijah message focused on God's everlasting covenant promise in Christ; God's "altars"; and God's "prophets" (vs. 14). The cross is the dynamic of the good news which delivers from sin, and this is the message of the gift of prophecy. All three aspects of the

gospel were counterfeited by old covenant unbelief; an unthankfulness for the sacrifice; and, disrespect for the Spirit of prophecy.

As in John the Baptist's fulfillment of the Elijah message, so the message that comes "before the great and dreadful day of the Lord" will "make ready a people prepared for the Lord" (Luke 1:17). It appears that "the third angel's message in verity" (Rev. 14:1-12) and the "Elijah message" are the same: repentance permeating the "body of Christ." Everything comes together: the "Elijah message" is that of the great "other angel" of Revelation 18:1-4; it's the final "everlasting gospel" of 14:6-15; it's the powerful repetition of "the fall of Babylon" of verse 8; it's the "witness" of the Lord Jesus to "the angel of the church of the Laodiceans," the last of the seven churches of history (3:14-21); it's the call to "be zealous therefore and repent"; finally, it's the appeal of the Disappointed Lover in the Song of Solomon to His Bride-to-be to consummate the long-delayed "marriage of the Lamb" (19:7, 8). And, Elijah reconciles her heart to Him! 1888 was the beginning of our Elijah message--the "loud cry" and "latter rain"--which breaks the drought and feeds the youth and adults with fresh bread from above. "The truth of the gospel" may be recovered (Gal. 2:5):

(a) "God is agape" (1 John 4:8). "We love Him, because He first loved us" (vs. 19). God loves both bad and ugly people.

(b) The message of the cross is that each soul is worth the life of the Son of God and the Father who gave Him to the world (John 3:16). Our hearts are at enmity with Him and hence we need the atonement.

(c) It necessarily follows that it's easy to be saved and hard to be lost as you see what it cost the dear Son of God to die for you.

(d) The ultimate meaning of the cross is the cleansing of the sanctuary truth. Our High Priest ministers His constraining love, giving us repentance (Rev. 3:19). A "remnant" of Laodicea will corporately repent.

(e) The sanctuary truth is a Saviour who is near to us, having overcome temptations. He took the "likeness" of our "sinful flesh" (Rom. 8:3). We may overcome "even as" He "overcame" (Rev. 3:21).

(f) The truth of the two covenants come into their own with the intersection of the cross, the Sabbath, justification by faith, the sanctuary, and the seal of God. A people are prepared to face the final examination of the mark of the beast and cast a vote for God in

"the hour of His judgment." With the love of God's law imparted to the 144,000, they are righteous by faith in Him, and prepared for His second coming (1 John 3:3).

--Paul E. Penno

Endnotes (from the writings of Ellen G. White):

[1] "The Little Things," *The Youth's Instructor*, April 28, 1898.

[2] *Prophets and Kings*, p. 228.

[3] "The Necessity of Dying to Self," *Review and Herald*, June 18, 1889.