

9. A Brand Plucked from the Fire (2Q 2011—Garments of Grace: Clothing Imagery in the Bible)

Biblical material: Zechariah 1–3, Rev. 12:10, Exod. 3:2–14, Eph. 2:8–10, John 14:15.

Quotes

- There is no neutral ground in the universe; every square inch, every split second, is claimed by God and counter-claimed by Satan. *C.S. Lewis*
- God is the Creator; Satan is the counterfeiter. *Edwin Louis Cole*
- When Satan fell he may have lost his innocence but he did not lose his intelligence. *Trevor Knight*
- Satan is not fighting churches; he is joining them. He does more harm by sowing tares than by pulling up wheat. He accomplishes more by imitation than outright opposition. *Vance Havner*
- Our journey is uphill, with a dead body upon our backs, the devil doing what he can to pull us down. *Philip Henry*
- There is no holiness without a warfare. *J.C. Ryle*

Questions

Why should this “change of clothes” of an ancient prophet be of interest to us? How is the great controversy illustrated here? What are the fundamental issues, and how are we involved? Why is it important to know where the war began and how this has impacted God’s universe? What does it say to us about the kind of person God is?

Bible summary

Zech. 1-3 has much imagery. The main point to observe is surely that there will be a final reckoning, that the situation will be resolved. The Accuser is revealed. Satan points the finger at Zechariah, but the Lord rebukes him. God re-clothes Zechariah—symbolically removing his sin as his filthy clothes are removed and replaced with “rich clothes.” Rev. 12:7-10 details the war in heaven and God’s victory as he hurls down the Accuser. Note that Scripture is very clear that God is not the Accuser, but Satan! In Exod. 3:2–14 the great controversy is played out as the “I AM” announces himself through Moses to Pharaoh, who claims to be God. As part of the cosmic conflict in which God is vindicated, we too gain salvation: “it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.” (Eph. 2:8 NIV). The graciousness of a gracious God! John 14:15 reminds us that as we love Jesus, we do what he says—not from craven fear or legal obligation, but from a conviction that right is right, and that God’s way is the only one that is good and also makes such good sense.

Comment

“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).” (Sabbath’s lesson).

Lucifer accused God of everything evil—of being harsh and legalistic, an unloving selfish Being who rules the Universe through fear. That is, the Devil accused God of being just like the Devil! He has arrogated God’s virtues to himself, and clothed God with all the rags of his own evil. No wonder then that God is “defaced”, and is rejected so often by those whose picture of God has been given them by the Arch liar. They have swallowed the distorted, perverted picture of God fed to them by the Antagonist, so that God’s name continues to be blackened and blasphemed.

While God wants trustworthy friends, the Devil enslaves those he forces to submit to his demands. An obedience that is based on slavish fear, an unquestioning terror that is always the Devil’s trademark. Only by inverting God’s system of government can the Devil justify himself. In his view, God becomes the tyrant, Satan the freedom-fighter; God the liar, Satan the source of truth; God the author of wrong, Satan the defender of the right.

To answer these charges God has permitted the Devil to work out his evil program, so that everyone may know where such rebellion leads. So that all may see God as he truly is, God came to this world. Jesus lived, died and rose again to reveal God’s love, and to show us the way back to him. “Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.” “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.” (John 17:3; 14:9 NIV).

Lucifer’s sin is far more than law-breaking. In essence, it is a total challenge to God and his character—the ultimate in self-centered individualism. To hide his true intentions, Lucifer cast himself in the role of freedom-fighter, trying to save the universe from a divine dictator.

To prove his point, Lucifer challenged God, declares war, and is ultimately thrown out of heaven. Having had the opportunity to demonstrate his character and methods, Lucifer had to leave. Jesus recalled the scene: “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.” (Luke 10:18 NIV). Lucifer’s ‘disinformation campaign’ comes to Earth. Satan, the Accuser, continues his attack on God and His truth, and we are part of it. Which is why this world has become a “a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to men.” (1 Corinthians 4:9 NIV). We are caught up in all of this. For what went wrong involves us too. The image of Zechariah’s “trial” and God as his defender is one that surely put an end to the lie that God is against us...

Ellen White Comments

It is Satan’s constant effort to misrepresent the character of God, the nature of sin, and the real issues at stake in the great controversy. His sophistry lessens the obligation of the divine law and gives men license to sin. At the same time he causes them to cherish false conceptions of God so that they regard Him with fear and hate rather than with love. The cruelty inherent in his own character is attributed to the Creator; it is embodied in systems of religion and expressed in modes of worship. Thus the minds of men are blinded, and Satan secures them as his agents to war against God. By perverted conceptions of the divine attributes, heathen nations were led to believe human sacrifices necessary to secure the favor of Deity; and horrible cruelties have been perpetrated under the various forms of idolatry. {GC 569}