

The Promised Revival: God's Mission Completed

(Passages to read in preparation for this study: Matt. 28:18-20; James 5:7, 8; Zech. 10:1; Matt.3:11; Rev. 18:1; 19:11-16.)

"Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand" (James 5:7, 8, NKJV).

The challenge of preaching the gospel in the context of the last three warning messages (Rev 14:6-12) to the entire world may seem impossible. Although the remnant Church is growing rapidly, it is not keeping up with the population. There are multiple areas of the world where the remnant message is not known.

The reality of this harsh fact leads to serious questions. Is it possible for the gospel to be preached to the entire world in this generation? Will there be some unusual breakthrough that will dramatically speed up the proclamation of the Rev 14:6-12 message? There is always one thing to keep in mind when we discuss this topic: the mission is God's, and He will accomplish it. At the same time, however, we must remember that we have been called to a crucial role in that final work, as well.

1. The Promised Power

Christ's Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20 is accompanied by His great promise.

What is that promise, what does it mean in a practical sense, and how can we draw comfort from it? Why is that promise so important to us?

The disciples preached not in their strength but in Christ's. According to Paul, in fact, the gospel was preached to every creature under heaven in just a few short years (Col. 1:23). Although some might question the precise meaning of Paul's words, it is undeniable that the gospel made a powerful impact on first century society. It changed the world. Christ promised His disciples that He would "'send the Promise of My Father'" and they would receive "'power from on high'" (Luke 24:49, NKJV). The Savior added, "'But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth'" (Acts 1:8, NKJV).

No matter how challenging the task, the promises of God are sure. Jesus' statement that "'this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come'" (Matt. 24:14, NKJV) is a promise. The proclamation of the gospel to the entire world may seem impossible, but God's power will overcome every obstacle. Every person on planet Earth will have a reasonable opportunity to hear and understand God's message of love and truth before the return of our Lord (See Rev. 18:1).

God will finish His work. He will pour out His Spirit in mighty power and accomplish what seems impossible according to all human planning.

What are ways that you can, in your immediate sphere, be a more effective witness for the Lord? That is, what can you do to help see the fulfillment of Matthew 24:14?

2. The Early and Latter Rain

Both the Old and New Testament use the symbolism of water to represent the Holy Spirit.

The prophet Isaiah quotes the words of our Lord, ““I will pour water on him who is thirsty. . . . I will pour My Spirit on your descendants”” (Isa. 44:3, NKJV). Isaiah uses a common Hebrew literary device called parallelism. The second phrase in the passage explains the first. The prophet Joel also discusses the symbolism of water. God promises to water Israel’s fields, then declares, ““And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh”” (Joel 2:28, NKJV). Jesus uses the symbolism of water to represent the Holy Spirit (John 7:37-39).

What are the two symbols that each of the following texts use regarding the outpouring of the Holy Spirit? Joel 2:21-24; 28-32; James 5:7-8. How are we to understand what they mean?

In Bible times, sowing and plowing took place from the middle of October, shortly after the falling of the early rains. These early rains brought the seed to germination and nurtured its early growth. The latter rain came in the late spring to bring the ripening fruit to harvest. The barley harvest and other grain harvests were spring events, followed by the fruit harvest in the summer (June - September and fall (October - November).

God uses the symbolism of the early and latter rain in two ways. The early rain of the Spirit fell upon the disciples at Pentecost in order to launch the Christian mission. The latter rain will be poured out on God’s church at the end of time in order to complete His mission on earth. The term the “early rain” also refers to the daily work of God’s Spirit convicting, instructing, guiding, and empowering each believer. The “latter rain” is a term used to describe a special endowment of God’s Holy Spirit (on Christ’s Church and every faithful member) to carry forward, from one stage to another, the process of spiritual growth towards perfection.

Under the figure of the early and the latter rain, that falls in Eastern lands at seedtime and harvest, the Hebrew prophets foretold the bestowal of spiritual grace in extraordinary measure upon God’s church. The outpouring of the Spirit in the days of the apostles was the beginning of the early, or former, rain, and glorious was the result. But near the close of earth’s harvest, a special bestowal of spiritual grace is promised to prepare the church for the coming of the Son of man. This outpouring of the Spirit is likened to the falling of the latter rain; and it is for this added power that Christians are to send their petitions to the Lord of the harvest ‘in the time of the latter rain.’

3. Prerequisites for the Latter Rain

What do the following texts tell us about the preparation needed in order to receive the Holy Spirit’s power in its fullness?

Acts 1:14, Zech. 10:1, Acts 3:18-20, 4:31, Ps. 119:25, John 6:63.

The Scriptures invite us to ask God for the Holy Spirit (Luke 11:13). The disciples believed Christ’s promise, waited in unity, and prayed for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8,14). The reason that God asks us to pray for the Holy Spirit is not because He is unwilling to give us the Spirit but because we are not prepared to receive it. As we pray for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, God works on our hearts to lead us to deeper repentance. Praying in small groups with other church members draws us into a closer bond of unity and fellowship. Both prayer and Bible study prepare our minds to be sensitive to the ministry of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

What is the natural result of spiritual renewal in our lives? Where does all spiritual revival and reformation lead? Ps. 51:10-13; Acts 4:13, 20; 5:33; 8:4.

"Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. Then I will teach transgressors your ways, so that sinners will turn back to you." (Ps. 51:10-13 NIV)

All spiritual revival and genuine reformation lead to a passionate desire to witness. When our hearts are filled with a deep appreciation for everything that Jesus has done for us, then, like Peter and John "we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20, NKJV). The outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the early rain on the day of Pentecost empowered the disciples to effectively witness. Their witness was so powerful that a rebellious mob in Thessalonica screamed in fear that "these who have turned the world upside down have come here too" (Acts 17:6, NKJV).

Just as the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost enabled the disciples to be a formidable witness to their generation, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in latter-rain power will empower God's church to reach the world in the final generation. It will take nothing less than latter-rain power to complete God's mission on earth, and God offers nothing less. Heaven's most precious gift is offered in infinite supply in order to accomplish the most urgent and important task ever entrusted His church.

The early disciples turned the world "upside down" with their preaching and witness. Why isn't that said of us?

4. The Baptism of Fire

Both the Old and New Testaments use a variety of symbols, such as water, wind, and oil, to describe the work of the Holy Spirit.

John the Baptist links another image, that of fire, to the work of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 3:11, Luke 3:16).

There are many who have misunderstood John's statement. The passage does not say, "He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit or with fire" (NKJV). It says, "He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire." The second expression, "and with fire," explains the first expression, "the baptism of the Holy Spirit." The baptism of the Holy Spirit is the baptism of fire. The word baptism in the New Testament is used 80 times and refers to total immersion.

Read the following passages and describe what the symbolism of fire represents in the Bible. Exod. 3:2-4; 24:17; 1 Kings 18:24; Mal. 3:2-3; Acts 2:1-4; Heb. 12:29.

The symbolism of fire is a symbol of the glory, presence, and power of God manifest in the ministry of the Holy Spirit. To be baptized with fire is to be immersed in the glory of God's presence through the Holy Spirit in order to witness in His power. Moses met God at the burning bush and then left the glory of His presence in order to witness to Pharaoh. Elijah witnessed to Israel in the glory of God's fiery presence on Mount Carmel. When tongues of fire fell on Pentecost, the disciples witnessed in languages that they had never before known. The baptism of the Holy Spirit is immersion in the presence and power of God in order that we can effectively witness of His glory.

Once again, in the last days of earth's history, God's people will be immersed in His presence, filled with His power, and sent out to witness of His glory to the world.

The earth will be filled with the glory of God. "For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea" (Hab. 2:14, NKJV). In prophetic vision, John saw an angel messenger descend from heaven and "the earth was illuminated with his glory" (Rev. 18:1, NKJV).

God's glory, His loving character, will be revealed through the power of the Holy Spirit to a waiting world and a watching universe. Every person on planet Earth will have the opportunity to both hear and understand God's last-day message.

God's glory, His loving character, will be revealed to the world. How can you, right now, in your own sphere, reveal that glory in your life? What will that require on your part?

5. The Great Controversy Ended

The entire book of Revelation can be summarized in just a few words: Jesus wins, Satan loses .

Read Revelation 12:17; 17:13-14; 19:11-16. What is the central message of these passages?

Here is good news: the same Jesus who defeated Satan on the cross will come again and triumph over the powers of hell and put a full end to evil (Rev. 19:19-21; Ezek. 28:18-19). Evil will not have the last word. Poverty and pestilence will not have the last word. Sickness and suffering will not have the last word. Chaos and crime will not have the last word. Disease and death will not have the last word.

Instead, God will.

Until then, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are doing everything possible to reach every person. God's heart aches over a lost world. Soon His people will reveal to the world, in both the witness of their words and their works, Jesus' amazing grace and truth.

Of course, Satan will do everything in His power to oppose this witness. The final crisis will break upon this world. Jesus will pour out His Spirit in latter-rain power, and the work of God on earth will be finished.

Because of the latter-rain Holy Spirit power, as with the early rains it can be expected that the servants of God, with their faces lighted up and shining with holy consecration, will hasten from place to place to proclaim the message from heaven. By thousands of voices, all over the earth, the warning will be given. Miracles will be wrought, the sick will be healed, and signs and wonders will follow the believers.

The work of God on earth will be finished. Jesus will come. All heaven and earth will rejoice. There is no more important priority in our lives than experiencing a revival of God's grace in our hearts daily and inviting His Holy Spirit to make us into His image (1 John 3:1-3).

Our world is falling apart. Who can't see that? Is there anything that matters more than opening our hearts to Jesus and pleading for the revival and reformation so needed, not just by each one of us

individually but by the remnant church as a whole? What would happen if our own hearts were totally surrendered to Him and we were completely devoted to spreading this message to the world?

Amen.

~~~~~

### **Early and Latter Rain**

#### **Water in the Bible is emblematic of the Holy Spirit.**

(Article written in 1968)

Water in the Bible is emblematic of the Holy Spirit. Jesus called it "living" water when in converse with the Sychar woman. It is "holy" water in Numbers 5:17, but if the woman was guilty it was changed to "bitter" water. It was the "water of purifying" in Numbers 8:7, or in the Revised Version, the "water of expiation" (atonement).

Said Jesus, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified)" (John 7:37- 39).

When Joshua and the Israelites crossed the Jordan and came into the land of Canaan, they came into a well-watered, well-favored land. In Goshen of Egypt they had been forced to irrigate their farms and gardens. "But," said the Lord, "the land, whither ye go to possess it, is a land of hills and valleys, and drinketh water of the rain of heaven" (Deut. 11:11).

There were two seasons of the year in which the rain fell abundantly. In the latter part of October and early November (the Hebrew month of Heshwan) came the early rains.

The second downpour came in the spring in the latter part of March and the first part of April (the Hebrew month of Nisan). The October-November rains were called the early rain, and the March-April rains were called the latter rain.

### **Water represents work of Holy Spirit**

In the East the former rain falls at the sowing-time. It is necessary in order that the seed may germinate. Under the influence of the fertilizing showers, the tender shoot springs up. The latter rain, falling near the close of the season, ripens the grain, and prepares it for the sickle. The Lord employs these operations of nature to represent the work of the Holy Spirit. As the dew and the rain are given first to cause the seed to germinate, and then to ripen the harvest, so the Holy Spirit is given to carry forward, from one stage to another, the process of spiritual growth. The ripening of the grain represents the completion of the work of God's grace in the soul. By the power of the Holy Spirit the moral image of God is to be perfected in the character. We are to be wholly transformed into the likeness of Christ.

## **Rains Delayed**

Canaan was the land of the Hittites, the Canaanites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, and the Hivites. This was the land "flowing with milk and honey" (Ex. 3:8). It was "a land of wheat, and barley, and vines, and fig trees, and pomegranates; a land of oil olive, and honey" (Deut. 8:8). God gave His people the land and blessed them in it, but it was on conditions of obedience:

"Thou shalt keep the commandments of the Lord thy God, to walk in his ways, and to fear him. . . . Beware that thou forget not the Lord thy God, in not keeping his commandments, and his judgments, and his statutes, which I command thee this day" (verses 6, 11).

With the passing of time, when the people forgot God, the "early" and "latter" rains were delayed or did not fall. The people came to recognize this as due to their sins. Thus when the rain did not fall they would declare periods of fasting, which sometimes continued for several weeks until the rains came.

## **Two Great Visitations**

The two periodic seasons of rain in the land of Canaan symbolized the two great visitations of the Holy Spirit—one at the beginning of the gospel dispensation, and the other at its close. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was the former rain. This was given at Jerusalem. The stage was perfectly set. It was the Feast of Pentecost, and "devout men, out of every nation under heaven" were there. The visitors from some eighteen different nations were astonished at what they saw, what they heard, and what they experienced under the Spirit's power. Peter stood up and told the people this was the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy that God would in the last days "pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams" (Acts 2:17).

Made courageous by the Holy Spirit, the coward of the crucifixion told the people they had crucified the Lord of glory, even Jesus the Son of God. When the people heard this they were "pricked in their heart" by the Holy Spirit, and cried out: "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Peter's reply is for all generations: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (verses 37, 38).

That very day three thousand were converted and baptized. The Spirit continued His work and other thousands were baptized. "The word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:7). So great was the Spirit's grace and power that Paul, near the close of his ministry, wrote to the Colossians and said, "the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister" (Col. 1:23).

The Spirit came upon the waiting, praying disciples with a fulness that reached every heart. The Infinite One revealed Himself in power to His church. . . . The sword of the Spirit, newly edged with power and bathed in the lightnings of heaven, cut its way through unbelief. Thousands were converted in a day.

## **Words Made Powerful**

Under the power of the Spirit the words of Peter and the other apostles became powerful instruments to convict the hearts of men for their wickedness in crucifying Jesus. This was the "early" rain, the "former" rain, and tremendous were the results of it; but the outpouring of the Spirit in the "latter" rain will be even greater. Millions embraced the faith of Jesus during the early outpouring, but multiple millions will be converted during the latter rain.

## **Now Is the Time**

We are now living in the time of the "latter rain." Showers are falling in a few places on earth, but generally this is not so. Generally, "as a people, ... we are as dry as the hills of Gilboa that had neither dew nor rain." As the original disciples prayed for the fulfilment of the promised Spirit, so are we invited to pray: "Ask ye of the Lord rain in the time of the latter rain" (Zech. 10:1).

The Spirit was given in Pentecostal power in answer to prayer, together with confession of sin and dedication of life. The Spirit will be given in "latter rain" power in response to exactly the same conditions. There is nothing that we need so much as Pentecostal power in this hour. We talk of "finishing the work," and yet we are no more able to finish it than the early disciples were to begin the work without the Holy Spirit's power.

God will give the "latter rain" as He did the "former," but we must seek for it. Do not rest satisfied that in the ordinary course of the season, rain will fall. Ask for it. The growth and perfection of the seed rests not with the husbandman. God alone can ripen the harvest. But man's co-operation is required. God's work for us demands the action of our mind, the exercise of our faith.

Camp meetings, workers' meetings, general laymen's meetings, and assemblies of local church leaders provide an unexcelled opportunity to unitedly seek God for the outpouring of the "latter rain." It will be given. God has promised that, but meekness humility, and earnestness must characterize the supplicants.

He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him" (Ps. 126:6).

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the "latter rain" brings to an end the long drought since the cessation of power at about the close of the first century. True, as in Canaan, there were showers at different times and places between the "former" and "latter" rains. Notwithstanding the times in which we are living, God's people seem oblivious to their great need.

The message of God to the Laodiceans is designed to arouse them to their wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked" condition. The Lord's advice largely goes unheeded: "I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see" (Rev. 3:17, 18).

When the people of God come to the place of persistent prayer, the place where Peter, James, John, and the rest of the apostolic company came after the ascension, the "latter rain" will fall and multitudes will be converted. Joel 2:23 promises both the former rain and the latter: "Be glad then,

ye children of Zion, and rejoice in the Lord your God: for he hath given you the former rain moderately, and he will cause to come down for you the rain, the former rain, and the latter rain in the first month."

The latter rain, ripening earth's harvest, represents the spiritual grace that prepares the church for the coming of the Son of man. But unless the former rain has fallen, there will be no life; the green blade will not spring up. Unless the early showers have done their work, the latter rain can bring no seed to perfection. Only those who are living up to the light they have will receive greater light. Unless we are daily advancing in the exemplification of the active Christian virtues, we shall not recognize the manifestations of the Holy Spirit in the latter rain.

Let God's people abandon their indifference concerning the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in final, last-day power. These are not times when Christians can risk carelessness. To relax our efforts in spiritual growth will prove fatal. To fail in faith and prayer in such a time as this is to fail of gaining heaven.

Christ warned: "Watch and pray." "Watch unto prayer."

Amen.