

The Latter Rains

by
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In the prophetic parable of the ten virgins we notice an unusual encounter between the “wise virgins” and the “foolish virgins” in which the foolish virgins recognize, not only that they are running out of oil (the apparent presence of the Holy Spirit) but that the wise virgins obviously have an abundant manifestation of the Holy Spirit.

The conflict between “Charismatic” believers and “cessationist” believers over the manifestation of certain gifts of the Spirit has not generated this open, church-wide recognition of the manifestations of the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, this future event must represent a significant change in the status quo.

But what is this event taking place among the wise virgins and recognizable to, but apparently unobtainable by, the foolish virgins?

In the early church new believers spontaneously spoke in unknown tongues or prophesied as soon as they received the Holy Spirit. In some cases believers did not receive the Holy Spirit until hands were laid on them, but as soon as they did receive the Holy Spirit many of them spoke in tongues without ever having heard of “tongues” or “prophesying.”

This sign, like the sign of Ananias and Sapphira (i.e. God taking out believers who have become “leaven” to the body of Christ during a time in which the glory of the Lord is obviously present in the church), will occur again during an end times outpouring of the Spirit on believers. New believers will speak in tongues and prophesy even in traditional churches as the Spirit enables them. This will confound many traditional believers and some Charismatic believers as the power of the Spirit is manifested through the believers at the moment of salvation.

This outpouring of the Spirit spoken of by the prophet Joel, and commented on by Peter and James has been referred to as the “latter rains.” Yet, certain areas of confusion need to be addressed in order to understand the prophetic fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy as it relates to the church today.

Be glad then, ye children of Zion, and rejoice in the LORD your God: for he hath given ... (past tense)... 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... Joel 2:23 KJV

This prophecy delivered to national, ethnic Israel by Joel states that God had already given them the “former rain” moderately. This “moderate” former rain came to national, ethnic Israel in the form of God’s spiritual anointing on His prophets, priests, and kings, and not on the entire body of corporate Israel.

Then Joel delivers the future prophetic promise of both the former and the latter rain in the first month.

The first month of the Jewish calendar is Nissan, the same month in which Passover occurs. It was on 14 Nissan that the Lord was crucified and on 17 Nissan He was resurrected.

Thus it is the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord that initiated the fulfillment of this prophecy.

There is no known old covenant event revealed in scripture, from Joel forward, that could potentially be a fulfillment of this promise, and, because Peter claimed the day of Pentecost as the “beginning” of the fulfillment of this promise, we must assume that Joel’s prophecy was for “spiritual Israel,” the “Israel of God,” as the true “children of Zion” for whom the promise was intended.

Joel also identified the month of Nissan, the “first month” of the Jewish calendar as the time in which this promise would begin to be fulfilled.

Pentecost, though, takes place during the month of Sivan fifty days after Passover, which takes place on 14 Nissan.

Thus the prophetic promise of Joel 2:23 was initiated by the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ in the month of Nissan (the first month), but Pentecost is always viewed as being vitally connected to Passover, as though Pentecost, taking place fifty days after Passover, is the ultimate result of Passover.

Therefore, the promise, as prophesied by Joel, was initiated (made possible) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the church (the true “children of Zion”) received the full package of both the restoration of the former rain falling on the Lord’s prophets and the latter rain falling on “all flesh” (all believers, not just the prophets) on Pentecost.

We cannot ignore the importance of the fact that the “former” limited outpouring of the Spirit on the prophets, priests, and kings of Israel included spectacular, special faith events like calling fire down from heaven, which have not, yet, taken place in church, even in the first days of the church. But the restored “former” rains and the “latter” rains are both prophesied for the church.

As we examine the rest of Joel’s prophecy we note that the context of v. 23 refers forward to vv.27-32.

And ye shall know...(as a result of the outpouring)... ***that I am in the midst of Israel...***(which we know by context to be spiritual Israel, the Israel of God in Christ)..., ***and that I am the LORD your God, and none else: and my people shall never be ashamed...***(from that first Pentecost forward).

Thus the most important purpose of the outpouring of the Spirit is to manifest the glory and presence of the Lord in the church.

Note: National, ethnic Israel was ashamed in 70 AD. This prophecy, therefore, has nothing whatsoever to do with national, ethnic Israel.

His presence in the midst of spiritual Israel, as promised, was evident on the day of Pentecost and in the early years of the church, but, as the Lord tarried, the evidence of His presence in the form of the Spirit's outpouring or manifestation began to fade, a turn of events identified and prophesied by the Lord in the parable of the ten virgins as "falling asleep."

Apart from the specific revelation of the Spirit of truth, Peter would not have been able to discern the application of Joel 2:23-32 to the church, but, after the outpouring of the Spirit on the 120 upper room believers, Peter did reveal the application of Joel's prophecy to the church:

But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel;

"And it shall come to pass ...(afterward)...in the last days," saith God, "I will 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:

"And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy:

(A break is inserted here for exegetical as Joel jumps forward all the way to the day of the Lord.)

"And I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke: The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and notable day of the Lord come: And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved." Acts 2:16-21 KJV (quoting from Joel 2:28-32)

Review the following observations from Joel's prophecy as Peter related it to the church:

1. Joel identifies the time in which his prophecy would come to pass as "the last days."
2. Peter makes the application of this last days prophecy to the church by saying, "This is that which was prophesied by the prophet, Joel."
3. Thus the promise to national, ethnic Israel is fulfilled, not to national, ethnic Israel, but to spiritual Israel, the church, in Christ, which is consistent with the fact that all of the covenant promises of God now belong to Jesus of Nazareth, the only Israelite to fulfill the law and the prophets and qualify as the inheritor of the covenant promises of God. (2 Corinthians 1:20). The covenant promise of God in Joel 2:23 is "yes" in Christ and, therefore, still belongs to the church though it is not being fully manifested at this time.
4. The promise of the restoration of natural former and latter rains to literal Israel points to and illustrates an outpouring of the Spirit on spiritual Israel (the church) as both the former "moderate" rains and the latter rains to bring in the complete harvest.
5. "All flesh" obviously does not mean all men and women whether believers or not, because the outpouring began with only 120 in the upper room. The inclusive "all," therefore, means both Jews and Gentiles who receive Christ by faith, not just ethnic Jews. It also means all believers, not just prophets.
6. We know by context that it is a progressive outpouring beginning in the first month of Nissan with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ as both a former and a latter rain and not concluding until the resurrection on the last day.
7. The prophecy itself does not reveal or explain a time of lesser rainfall in which the

manifestation of the Spirit and the glory of the Lord was to be less than it was in the beginning.

What this means is that there is no specific discontinuance of the outpouring from the resurrection of Jesus Christ until the last day resurrection of the saints in Joel's prophecy or in Peter's explanation of the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy.

And, because this covenant promise belongs to Christ, it still belongs to the church.

Yet, experientially and historically we recognize that the body of Christ as a whole seems to be in a period of drought where the "rain" of the Holy Spirit and the manifested glory of the Lord is concerned.

Cessationists, seeking to explain the absence of the manifestations of the Spirit in their churches, have claimed that certain manifestations of the Spirit have passed away with either: 1) the passing of the original apostles, or: 2) the development of the full canon of scripture in the 4th century church.

Neither of these explanations can be supported by scripture, but the Lord provides the clear explanation for this period of lesser rainfall in the prophetic parable of the ten virgins given to Peter, Andrew, James and John as a part of His prophecy for the church spoken to them on the Mount of Olives. (Matthew 24 and 25, Mark 13, Luke 21)

The Lord's clear parabolic explanation is that the vigorous faith of the early church began to wane because He tarried, and the entire body of Christ fell asleep. "Sleep" in this instance does not mean death but, rather, a loss of vigorous faith and a subsequent decline in the manifestations of the Spirit.

Yet, throughout church history there have remained remnant pockets of revived Christians in various places at various times among whom the manifestations of the Spirit have glorified the Lord.

This became more evident in the great revivals of the 18th and 19th centuries and in the Charismatic renewal, but still does not approach the manifestations of the Spirit as experienced by the 1st century church.

So how do we account for the historical fact that there has been a drought of this outpouring on the church at large, and that the corporate church, in spite of the Charismatic renewal, has not generally manifested the signs of this outpouring of the Spirit, other than the gift of speaking and/or praying in tongues, either as a continuance of the former rains or as the heavy latter rains?

Our observation of historical reality demonstrates that wherever the church has been institutionalized by denominational bureaucracy, including Charismatic denominational bureaucracy, it has also been hindered by "winds of doctrine" and by the deceptions of men who are themselves deceived. And, it is important to note that institutionalization of the church is basically non-existent in the underground persecuted church wherever it is found in the world today. And it is important to note that the power gifts and spoken gifts of the Spirit frequently manifest in the underground persecuted church.

The institutional church, too, was largely ignored in the great revivals of 18th and 19th centuries. Thus it is likely that the future, restored fullness of this promise in Christ will be hindered in those who cling to Pharisaical denominational and institutional tradition while it will be manifested in those "wise virgins" who are willing to abandon false doctrine and false practice in order to follow the Lord in the fullness of the Spirit.

In Israel the former or early (fall) rains come in November and December, preparing the soil and germinating the seed of grain crops like wheat and barley, and the latter (spring) rains cause the crops to mature for harvest. The latter (spring) rains are also known as the “heavy” rains.

The outpouring of the Spirit on the holy remnant of the kingdom, the church, on the day of Pentecost, is presented as an outpouring of both the “early” fall rains for the purpose of germinating the seed of the newborn church of Jesus Christ (spiritual Israel) and the heavy “latter” rains for maturing the crop for harvest. And, on that basis, we could expect a distinct outpouring of the Holy Spirit as the “latter” spring rains to bring about the fullness of the harvest all the way through tribulation to the last day resurrection.

But what scriptural proof of this apparent parallel do we have?

James reveals this specific parallel as he instructs believers to be patient while they wait for the coming of the Lord for His church, which is on “the last day” prior to the day of the Lord.

Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. ... (the day the harvest will be complete)... ***The farmer***... (the church as the manifestation of Christ in the earth)... ***waits for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it, until it gets the early and late rains. You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near.*** James 5:7,8 NASB (inserts and emphasis are the author’s)

James tells us, through analogy, that the church, as the manifestation of Christ in the earth, is to keep a patient vigil over the land until it receives both the seed germinating early rains and the harvest producing latter rains, the heavy spring rains. What we have to read between the lines in this mystery is that there is a period of lesser rainfall between the early seed germinating rains and the beginning of the latter harvest producing rains.

The promise of the fullness of the combined former “moderate” rains that fell on the prophets of national, ethnic Israel and the latter rains together (the combined rains) in the first month has been ours from the day of Pentecost forward, because this covenant promise is to Christ and those who are in Christ.

There is, therefore, no reason for a drought in the church apart from our somnolence, our loss of vigorous faith, which the Lord has described prophetically as the church (the virgins) falling asleep.

But we can expect a WAKE UP event that will cause the rains to fall again in an ever-increasing manifestation of the outpouring of the Spirit and of the glory of the Lord when we hear the clarion call of the Spirit.

Behold! The bridegroom is coming.

A period of lesser rainfall between the day of Pentecost and a future manifestation of the heavy spring rains corresponds perfectly with the natural rainfall patterns in Israel, with the prophetic revelations of Joel, Peter, James, and Jesus (Matthew 25) and with the historical fact that the church has been asleep and sub-normal, with only intermittent “rains” in various places at various times as parts of the body of Christ have been revived.

The outpouring of the Spirit as the latter rains will be preceded and accompanied by our experience of the accelerated and intensified “birth pains” in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke

21, and that prospect is frightening even though we know that it must take place.

What that means practically for end time believers is that we and the world will be subjected to a time of great difficulty. It will be in that time of shaking and squeezing that our faith will be tested and revived as the “wise” virgins begin to respond in repentance to the issues that the Lord has identified in His letter to the churches (Revelation 2 and 3).

And it will be the wise virgins, those who have become obedient to the Lord in the testing of their faith under extreme persecution and difficult circumstances who will receive the help of the latter rains outpouring of the Spirit.

Thus I expect the latter rains to begin with the wake up event described in the parable of the ten virgins when the groomsman cries out, ***Behold! The bridegroom is coming.***

It has concerned me since my early days of walking with the Lord that Paul’s prophetic passage in Ephesians 4 concerning the genuine unity and maturity of the body of Christ, attaining ***to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ***, and the Lord’s own prophetic prayer recorded in John 17, prophesying the unity and glory of the church that would be a witness to the whole world, have been summarily dismissed or spiritualized by Laodicean teachers of the word.

Likewise, because of erroneous dispensational tradition concerning the church’s identification as the exclusive and unique “bride of Christ” (exclusive of OT saints and millennial saints), we have failed to identify the important prophetic message given to the disciples immediately before the Lord’s betrayal and crucifixion in response to their question, “When will these things happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?”

The sign of His coming will be the final awakening and anointing of the church in accordance with the Lord’s prophetic parable of the ten virgins, the Lord’s prophetic prayer concerning the unity and glory of the church as recorded in John 17, Paul’s prophecy concerning the fullness and unity of the church given in Ephesians 4, Peter’s revelation concerning the partial outpouring of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost as being the “beginning” of that which Joel prophesied in Joel 2:23-31, James’s prophecy concerning the purpose of the outpouring of the Spirit on the church as both the former and latter rains, and the Revelation of Jesus Christ given to John, the apostle, for the church.

This final awakening of the remnant church will come as a worldwide wave of revival among the “wise virgins” in a time of great, unprecedented trouble in the world, and those, at the time, who are prompted by the Spirit to trim their lamps are those who will be carried along by this wave and eventually experience the fullness of Christ in the world.

As an aside we know that 500 were invited to the upper room, but only 120 showed up. Which group would you want to be in?

Each of us have the same choice the 500 had. This is no longer a hypothetical question. Will we eagerly pray for and anticipate the clarion call of the Lord to awaken us from our slumber and repent? Will we eagerly seek the outpouring of the Holy Spirit as the combined rains on the remnant church, which will glorify the Lord, or will we cling to our spiritually impoverished dogma in denial of this revelation?

The “foolish virgins” will refuse the call to repentance as specifically identified by the Lord in Revelation 2 and 3. The “wise virgins” will repent. The “foolish virgins” will witness and recognize the outpouring of the heavy spring rains on the “wise virgins,” resembling, if not exceeding, the outpouring of the Spirit on the 120 and the early church.

But when the “foolish virgins” are told how to obtain the oil (the Spirit as an anointing) from the vendor (the Lord) through repentance from false doctrine, false practice, and false interpretations of scripture (i.e. winds of doctrine based on the deceptions of men who are themselves deceived), their bondage to denominationalism, tradition, and the authority and arrogance of their own intellects, like the Pharisees who denied the Lord Himself, will cause them to be offended, to stumble and, eventually, fall away from the faith under persecution.

But there will be a holy remnant who will receive an outpouring of the Spirit as the heavy, harvest producing rains, and who will overcome both the extreme deceptions and the extreme persecutions of the enemy by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony, even though they are betrayed, imprisoned, tortured, and martyred for their faith. Yet they will overcome as an uncountable number from every nation, tribe, and tongue come to faith in Christ before His appearing. (Revelation 7:9-14)

Is this, then, something to fear? Or does your heart soar with the vision thus revealed by the Spirit to those upon whom the fulfillment of this prophecy will come?

So let us know, let us press on to know the LORD

His going forth is as certain as the dawn;

And He will come to us like the rain,

Like the spring rain ,,,(the heavy, harvest producing, latter rain)...

watering the earth. Hosea 6:3 NASB (insert is the author's)

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