

The Rain and the Harvest

Happy Sabbath to all.

This week, I would like to make an examination, and something of a clarification, of the Latter Rain. I believe that we have yet new things to learn about this subject by way of preparation for the close of human probation. Let us begin by going through the primary verses used from the Scriptures when discussing this subject:

“That I will give you the rain of your land in his due season, the first rain and the latter rain, that thou mayest gather in thy corn, and thy wine, and thine oil.” (Deu 11:14)

“Be glad then, ye children of Zion, and rejoice in Yahweh your Elohim; 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.” (Joel 2:23)

“Ask ye of Yahweh rain in the time of the latter rain; so Yahweh shall make bright clouds, and give them showers of rain, to everyone grass in the field.” (Zech 10:1)

“Then shall we know, if we follow on to know Yahweh; His going forth is prepared as the morning; and He shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth.” (Hos 6:3)

“Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of Yahweh. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain.” (James 5:7)

There is something quite interesting there, an idea that Yah is showing His people through the use of these verses scattered across both the Old and New Testaments. One of the concepts that keeps recurring, even in the James verse, is that there is a connection between the former and latter rains. As Adventists, we have generally accepted that the “former rain” represents the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples of Yahshua at Pentecost, and the “latter rain” will descend upon the last-day believers to aid the final evangelical work. But there is a subtle error, or at least, a false thought that may be accepted because of the wording of this last part, that I would like to clarify tonight.

Our first step toward this clarification is to examine the record that we have of the Former Rain. Of this event, we read: “And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.” (Acts 2:1-4)

Later on in the chapter, and the timing here is significant, we read, “And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles.” (Acts 2:42, 43)

Some have thought, or have been taught, that the “signs and wonders” were specific results of receiving the Former Rain. However, there are several problems with this, contributing to the potential misunderstanding that I mentioned before.

First, Yahshua said to His disciples, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.” (Mark 16:15-18)

The signs and wonders that the apostles performed were not tied to any one event, or any one moment in time. They performed these things during Yahshua’s earthly ministry, and in Mark 16, the Messiah tells us that the signs follow “them that believe,” not only those who received the visible manifestation of the Former Rain in Acts 2.

Second, we read this other passage commonly associated with the Latter Rain, “And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions. And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my Spirit. And I will shew wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of Yahweh come.” (Joel 2:28-31)

Joel is explicitly mentioned in Acts 2:17, making our connection between these two incidents certain; and making it clear that Joel is describing a dual fulfillment of the outpouring of the Spirit, speaking of both the Former and Latter Rain incidents, as the other prophets quoted earlier often did.

In Joel’s description of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in these days, he describes dreams, visions and prophecy, all spiritual gifts designed to bring outsiders to a saving knowledge of the truth. It is certainly true that signs and wonders are mentioned here – but the believers are not the ones to do them. Yah is the one who does these things (the sun as darkness and the moon as blood) to mark the time during which these events take place – and this account is consistent with the record of Pentecost, in which the reception of the Former Rain gave the apostles and disciples great power and opportunity to preach, to reach out to others with the Gospel.

So, we have seen the record of the Holy Spirit falling on mankind both from the historical perspective of Acts, and the prophetic perspective of the Old Testament authors. Now, we may turn to Yahshua’s parables for a third witness.

“Another parable put He forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field. But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also.

“So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, ‘Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? From whence then hath it tares?’ He said unto them, ‘An enemy hath done this.’ The servants said unto him, ‘Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up?’

“But he said, ‘Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.’” (Mat 13:24-30)

In His explanation of the parable to His disciples in the verses that followed, Yahshua said, “The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one. The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world.” (Mat 13:38-40)

It is commonly understood that the purpose of the latter rain is to give the wheat a final shower of blessings to prepare them for the above-mentioned harvest. This is certainly consistent with the symbolism employed, as it was written in our very first verse: “That I will give you the rain of your land [...] that thou mayest gather in thy corn, and thy wine, and thine oil.” (Deu 11:14)

It is the nature of that “preparation” that is sometimes misunderstood. Furthermore I notice, in all these verses, whether they speak of history, or prophecy, or parable, that the rain is for the benefit of the wheat, those waiting to be gathered. Now, one might ask, “What is new about that? We are either wheat, or we are tares, and so we are expecting this rain to refresh us before the end.”

So far as this goes, it is true; but for those of us who are called to labor in this eleventh hour, we identify just as much with the angels, with the reapers, as we do with the wheat. We are not called, if you remember the parable of the workers in the vineyard, to stand in the field and grow. We are not called to plant ourselves and await the refreshing showers. Those who know the truth are called to work IN the field, to prepare the wheat (including those who have not yet come to the truth) for the harvest.

This distinction has some implications for our understanding of the latter rain, what it is supposed to do, and perhaps more significantly... what it is NOT supposed to do.

Common SDA wisdom is that when the Latter Rain comes, this is when mankind will be given the power to put away all sin, to live perfectly, and to withstand the brightness of Christ’s coming. This is entirely false. Even the Former Rain did not occur according to this pattern, but the apostles had gone through a spiritual trial (the testing of their faith at the crucifixion of Christ) and then come into harmony in the upper room, confessing and forsaking their sins... and then the rain came upon them.

The Spirit of Prophecy writings confirm that the Latter Rain will not be received by those who have any sin in their lives; so then, even if Christianity were to be legitimately confused by what exactly the Latter Rain is intended to do, Seventh-day Adventists of all people have no such excuse, accepting as we do the inspiration that the Church received in the 1800s.

So no, the latter rain is not sent to perfect the believers. Nor is it sent specifically to empower the believers to work miracles, which is the other common misunderstanding that I mentioned above. It is not intended, in fact, to give the believers any “new” gifts that will enable them to begin performing the work of Evangelism. If any, therefore, including any among us, are awaiting some special “call” by the Holy Spirit, or some special outpouring, to prepare us to teach the Gospel, we do not yet have a right understanding of the Latter Rain.

Of course, some are called to do special works, but the Latter Rain is more about opening ears than loosening tongues. When we have received the Latter Rain the Spirit may give us special occasions to speak, “filled with the Spirit” as Peter did at Pentecost. And yet, what did Peter say then that had not been said before, and that we have not said since?

The real miracle of Pentecost was that people from every nation heard the preaching about Yahshua, and that their hearts were changed by the hearing. This is what the Latter Rain does... it falls on the fields, on the wheat, while we (the workers) go forth to gather them into the Father's barn. In this way, we cooperate with the Father and Son, as their Spirit prepares the fields for its harvest.

Now, of course... if a worker is laboring in the hot sun, he will appreciate some clouds and some rain, but the real blessing, the intended blessing, is for the crops. This is a parallel to the Former Rain. The tongues of flame fell on the apostles, but the blessing was truly for those who had been gathered from the various nations. Since we are also wheat (here is another example of a kind of dual fulfillment), we are blessed just like all others, and Joel tells us how – with dreams, and visions, and the words of the Spirit. And these are all things designed specifically to take advantage of what the rain does to the wheat of the harvest. We must cease to think of “self” even with regard to the gifts for salvation. We must see all that we receive as a way of showing our love for Yahweh, and for our fellow men as ourselves. This is the fulfillment of all the Law that our Father has given to us.

Again, the Latter Rain is not to give us power to work miracles, or cast out demons, or heal the sick. These things took place both before and after Pentecost. In fact, the only spiritual gift given at the reception of the former rain itself, on that day, was the gift of clear communication. Now, Brethren, you know from our previous weeks' studies, that Yahshua is gifting you with clear communication even now. The focus of our recent studies together is no coincidence. We are learning how to perfect communication and thus (as I mentioned in a previous week) how to perfect the love of Yah. Look at all verses from the beginning of this study, and you will see that the Latter Rain is to give us the opportunity, and the ability, to teach the truth as it is in Yahshua – the full and undiluted truth of the Gospel.

And what does this mean for us, who require no “new” gifts for this? What this means is that it is literally true that the Latter Rain has been falling all around us, and few have been aware. The Latter Rain falls on us, and we know that we have accepted it when, as the Bible has shown us, three very simple things take place.

1) We accept the truth and let it transform our lives. We become not merely wheat, but also harvesting angels (messengers). Yahweh says He is giving us the rain so we may “gather in” the harvest. This applies only to those who are His active, vibrant, victorious people, capable of doing so.

2) We come into harmony with the Body of Christ. As we saw with the apostles, they were unable to receive the rain until they had come into one accord with one another. Had this not taken place, the outpouring of the Spirit would have been entirely wasted, for the entire purpose of its appearing at that time was so that the willing would be converted and unite with the body of fellowship that was forming in the aftermath of Yahshua's death and resurrection. Let those who wish to stand apart from the Covenant of Yahshua, whether individually or as independent ministries, take note of these conditions for receiving the Latter Rain.

Finally:

3) We take up the work of evangelists.

If the purpose of the Latter Rain is truly to prepare the wheat for its ingathering, then we who claim to be awaiting the latter rain must have this as our primary objective. In other words, none will receive the

latter rain unless they are going to make use of it; none but evangelists receive this spiritual outpouring. It cannot be any way other than this – the gift of the Latter Rain is not (merely) for the benefits of those awaiting translation. It is a specific blessing, designed to give us opportunities to use our gifts to teach the Gospel effectively as we work in the vineyard, and any visible miracles associated with the outpouring of the Spirit are auxiliary.

These are the three steps to receiving and utilizing the blessings of the Latter rain. In this generation, it requires nothing else... and we have seen these three steps before. It is no great mystery. Those who accept, truly accept, the Three Angels' Message, to live a victorious life, to accept the pure doctrines as embraced and taught by the true Bride, sealing one's self to these things in the marriage covenant of the Lamb, and then to take up the work of teaching the Gospel, and warning the world about the Beast and his image... these things accompany and constitute the acceptance of the Latter Rain.

We only need to understand it to be so, and those blessings are ours already. As we have said, the latter rain has been falling already, and indeed, had been falling even in the days of our SDA pioneers. Character of Yah is not one to work wonders in some spectacular way under ordinary circumstances. That is not the course that infinite power and wisdom chooses to follow.

In Jeremiah 3 we read:

“Lift up thine eyes unto the high places, and see where thou hast not been lien with. In the ways hast thou sat for them, as the Arabian in the wilderness; and thou hast polluted the land with thy whoredoms and with thy wickedness. Therefore the showers have been withholden, and there hath been no latter rain; and thou hadst a whore's forehead, thou refusedst to be ashamed.” (Jer 3:2, 3)

It is not because Yah deliberately withholds some particular blessing from those organizations and Churches that betray Him that the Latter Rain is withheld. Jeremiah 3 is merely a statement of cause-and-effect. Because they have embraced wickedness, those ecclesiastical organizations that have united with the world and its policies cannot teach the truth as it is in Yahshua – they cannot teach the Gospel in its soul-saving purity. Because of this, they do not have the latter rain, which is the acceptance of, and spiritual power to do, these very things.

But for us, the acceptance of, and spiritual power to do, these very things, is just a choice we make. It is, as Jeremiah points out, a matter of the “forehead,” of the decision before us.

If we are going to be evangelists in spirit and in truth, if we are going to be harvesters of the world, then only do we receive the full blessing of Yah, the full outpouring of His grace as the latter rain. This is how one settles into the truth so that he or she “cannot be moved.” This is how the seal of Yahweh is received – in the forehead – when we turn resolutely from all that would detour us from this glorious work.

Let us, therefore, renew our dedication to the task of teaching the Three Angels' Message, and then we will see the rain falling around us, being blessed by it ourselves, and seeing where the opportunities to speak the words of the Spirit shall appear before us to the blessing of the waiting fields.