

The Early and the Latter Rain

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In this great second advent movement, the subject of the “latter rain” has long been one of special interest and importance. As far back as 1857, the Lord presented to His messenger in vision a thrilling picture of events that would take place in the closing of this work, including the experience of God’s people in receiving the latter rain.

Much instruction was given during subsequent years that should lead all believers to give careful study to this important subject. It is especially unsafe and unwise for our teachers and preachers to be content with vague or hazy ideas concerning this phase of our message, having their ideas formed by a merely casual reading of the *Testimonies*, and occasional allusions by other workers. We may well give careful and prayerful study to every scripture and every statement in the Spirit of prophecy that will make clear to us what the Lord has revealed concerning the early and latter rain.

James 5

⁷ Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waits for the precious fruit of the earth, and has long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain.

Here is a lesson designed for those who are waiting for the coming of the Lord. Its significance is explained:

Testimonies to Ministers, p. 306:

“Ask ye of the Lord rain in the time of the latter rain; so the Lord shall make bright clouds, and give them showers of rain. He will cause to come down for you the rain, the former rain, and the latter rain.” 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.

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.

A brief study of the subject will make it obvious that the expressions "early" and "latter" rain may properly be used as applying to:

1. individuals,
2. dispensations, and
3. generations.

The showers of the Holy Spirit may fall upon the individual with a life attuned to God, while others about are dry and barren.

Dispensationally, the early rain fell at the time of Pentecost, and the latter rain comes in the closing of the gospel work on earth.

And as for this generation, we understand that showers of the early rain fell in the 1844 movement, causing the seed of truth concerning the great judgment-hour message and the imminent appearing of Christ to spring up. From that time to the present, God's people have looked forward to the final outpouring of the latter rain.

Returning to the paragraph in *Testimonies to Ministers* just

quoted, we learn:

1. It is the early or former rain that causes the seed to germinate and the tender shoot to spring up.
2. The latter rain falls near the close of the season, ripening the grain and preparing it for the sickle.
3. The ripening of the grain represents the completion of the work of God's grace in the soul, by which the moral image of God is perfected in the character, and we are wholly transformed into the likeness of Christ.

We understand that all the work of God's grace in the soul is carried forward by the Holy Spirit, and that He is present with and in the believer from the moment he accepts Christ. Yet it must be obvious that there is some distinction between the work ordinarily done by the Holy Spirit and the special work which is called "the completion of the work of God's grace in the soul." Otherwise there would be no meaning in the illustration of the former and the latter rain.

It is also evident that it is not the latter rain that falls upon the seed when it is first sown and causes it to spring up, for if the former rain has not done its work, "the latter rain can bring no seed to perfection." The latter rain falls upon the grain that is approaching, or has reached maturity, and "prepares it for the sickle." This thought is further emphasized thus:

Testimonies to Ministers, p. 507:

Many have in a great measure failed to receive the former rain. They have not obtained all the benefits that God has thus provided for them. They expect that the lack will be supplied by the latter rain. When the richest abundance of grace shall be bestowed, they intend to open their hearts to receive it. They are making a terrible mistake.

Here the matter of the early and latter rain as a personal experience for each believer is made plain. Many are neglecting or ignoring the work that should be done in their lives by

the former rain, hoping and expecting that it will be accomplished by the latter rain. But this is “a terrible mistake.”

How important it must be, then, for each individual to understand and experience the work of the Holy Spirit as represented by the former rain, and make all necessary preparation in his own life for the final work of the Holy Spirit under the latter rain.

The question which now definitely confronts us is:

“What is embraced in the early rain experience?”

We know that the early rain is necessary in order that the seed may germinate. But how long will it be before the latter rain may be expected to fall upon those who have received the former rain?

Evidently this is not a matter of time, but of growth and development. In harmony with the inspired illustration, we infer that should the latter rain fall upon grain only a third or half-grown, it would not bring it to maturity. The Spirit of prophecy definitely indicates that the believer who has received the early rain must, under its ministry, obtain a certain degree of growth and maturity before he can receive the benefit of the latter rain. It is this startling fact that makes the whole question one of such vital importance to us as individuals.

I now give somewhat copious quotations from the writings of God’s messenger, as I wish to avoid giving a wrong impression such as is sometimes made by taking a sentence out of its proper setting. In each case, those who are interested in the subject should read the whole chapter, or passage, from which the quotation is taken.

Early Writings, p. 71:

I saw that many were neglecting the preparation so needful, and were looking to the time of “refreshing” and the “latter rain” to fit them to stand in the day of the Lord, and

to live in His sight. Oh, how many I saw in the time of trouble without a shelter! They had neglected the needful preparation, therefore they could not receive the refreshing that all must have to fit them to live in the sight of a holy God.

Those who refuse to be hewed by the prophets, and fail to purify their souls in obeying the whole truth, and who are willing to believe that their condition is far better than it really is, will come up to the time of the falling of the plagues, and then see that they needed to be hewed and squared for the building. But there will be no time then to do it, and no Mediator to plead their cause before the Father.

Before this time the awfully solemn declaration has gone forth, "He that is unjust let him be unjust still; and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still; and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still; and he that is holy, let him be holy still."

I saw that none could share the "refreshing," unless they obtain the victory over every besetment, over pride, selfishness, love of the world, and over every wrong word and action. We should, therefore, be drawing nearer and nearer to the Lord, and be earnestly seeking that preparation necessary to enable us to stand in the battle in the day of the Lord. Let all remember that God is holy, and that none but holy beings can ever dwell in His presence.

Other statements from the same source repeat and emphasize the solemn facts stated in this paragraph. Still others deal with different aspects of the same subject. But in not a single one is the latter rain promised on any other conditions, nor are the conditions diminished or modified. Summarizing our findings thus far:

1. Mrs. White saw that many were neglecting the preparation so needful.
2. They were looking to the time of refreshing and the latter rain to fit them to stand.
3. They were without a shelter in the time of trouble.
4. They had neglected the needful preparation; therefore they could not receive the refreshing which all must

have to fit them to live in the sight of a holy God.

5. They refused to be hewed by the prophets and failed to purify their souls.
6. They were willing to believe that their condition was far better than it was.
7. Thus they will come to the close of probation and the falling of the plagues, and there will be no Mediator to plead their cause.

The conditions upon which those who failed might have received the latter rain are very plain and unequivocal:

“I saw that none could share the ‘refreshing,’ unless they obtain the victory over every besetment.”

To show how the conditions upon which anyone receives the latter rain are emphasized and reiterated, notice this quotation:

Testimonies, vol. 5, p. 214:

Not one of us will ever receive the seal of God while our characters have one spot or stain upon them. It is left with us to remedy the ‘defects in our characters, to cleanse the soul temple of every defilement. Then the latter rain will fall upon us as the early rain fell upon the disciples on the day of Pentecost.

Sometimes the question is asked whether we have already seen the fulfillment of the promise of the latter rain, or whether it is still future. Surely a careful reading of the instruction given us will enable anyone to answer the question for himself. I quote from one of the early messages describing the latter-rain experience:

Testimonies, vol. 1, p. 179-183:

I was shown the people of God, and saw them mightily shaken. Some, with strong faith and agonizing cries, were pleading with God. Their countenances were pale, and marked with deep anxiety, expressive of their internal struggle. Firmness and great earnestness were expressed in their countenances, while large drops of perspiration fell from

their foreheads. Now and then their faces would light up with the marks of God's approbation, and again the same solemn, earnest, anxious look would settle upon them...

Some I saw, did not participate in this work of agonizing and pleading. They seemed indifferent and careless. They were not resisting the darkness around them, and it shut them in like a thick cloud. The angels of God left these, and I saw them hasten to the assistance of those who were struggling with all their energies to resist the evil angels...

I asked the meaning of the shaking I had seen, and was shown that it would be caused by the straight testimony called forth by the counsel of the True Witness to the Laodiceans. This will have its effect upon the heart of the receiver, and will lead him to exalt the standard and pour forth the straight truth. Some will not bear this straight testimony. They will rise up against it, and this will cause a shaking among God's people.

Said the angel, "List ye!" Soon I heard a voice that sounded like many musical instruments all in perfect strains, sweet and harmonious. It surpassed any music I had ever heard. It seemed to be so full of mercy, compassion, and elevating holy joy. It thrilled through my whole being.

Said the angel, "Look ye!" My attention was then turned to the company I had seen who were mightily shaken. I was shown those whom I had before seen weeping and praying with agony of spirit. The company of guardian angels around them had been doubled, and they were clothed with an armor from their head to their feet. They moved in exact order, firmly, like a company of soldiers. Their countenances expressed the severe conflict which they had endured, the agonizing struggle they had passed through.

Yet their features, marked with severe internal anguish, now shone with the light and glory of heaven. They had obtained the victory, and it called forth from them the deepest gratitude, and holy, sacred, joy.

The numbers of this company had lessened. Some had been shaken out and left by the way. The careless and indifferent, who did not join with those who prized victory and salvation enough to perseveringly plead and agonize for it, did not obtain it, and they were left behind in darkness, but

their numbers were immediately made up by others taking hold of the truth and coming into the ranks. Still the evil angels pressed around them, but they could have no power over them.

I heard those clothed with the armor speak forth the truth in great power. It had effect. I saw those who had been bound; some wives had been bound by their husbands, and some children had been bound by their parents. The honest who had been, held or prevented from hearing the truth, now eagerly laid hold of it. All fear of their relatives was gone. The truth alone was exalted to them. It was dearer and more precious than life. They had been hungering and thirsting for truth.

I asked what had made this great change. An angel answered, "It is the latter rain, the refreshing from the presence of the Lord, the loud cry of the third angel."

Two or three thoughts from this excerpt may well be pondered:

1. There will be a mighty shaking among God's people caused by the straight testimony, or Laodicean message.
2. Those who heed the straight testimony, and cry mightily to God will obtain the victory, and will receive the latter rain.
3. Those who do not prize the victory, and plead and agonize for it, drop out and are left in darkness.

Thus the emphasis is again upon the fact that only those who obtain the victory will receive the latter rain. It is repeatedly stated that each individual must make a definite preparation, if he is to receive the latter rain. Let us consider further the way in which that preparation is to be made:

Testimonies to Ministers, p. 507:

Every individual must realize his own necessity. The heart must be emptied of every defilement, and cleansed for the indwelling of the Spirit. It was by the confession and forsaking of sin, by earnest prayer and consecration of themselves to God that the early disciples prepared for the outpouring

of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. The same work, only in greater degree, must be done now.

What an astonishing statement concerning the disciples! They had been associated intimately with Jesus for three and a half years. They had observed His prayer life, and at their request He had taught them to pray. Yet it required ten days to bring them to an understanding of what it meant to offer effectual prayer. From the urgent admonitions in the Scriptures and the *Testimonies* to “pray for the latter rain,” we may gain some idea of its importance to us in these closing days of the world.

Testimonies, vol. 5, p. 158:

We should pray as earnestly for the descent of the Holy Spirit as the disciples prayed on the day of Pentecost. If they needed it at that time, we need it more today. Moral darkness, like a funeral pall, covers the earth. All manner of false doctrines, heresies, and Satanic deceptions, are misleading the minds of men. Without the Spirit and power of God, it will be in vain that we labor to present the truth.

The third angel’s message is to lighten the earth with its glory; but only those who have withstood temptation in the strength of the Mighty One will be permitted to act a part in proclaiming it when it shall have swelled into the loud cry.

Not only does the Lord tell us plainly the preparation that must be made under the ministration of the early rain in order that we may receive the latter rain, but He tells us that He is ready at any time to fulfill His promise, and that the latter rain will come when we reach the standard He requires.

The Review and Herald, March 22, 1892:

Today you are to give yourselves to God that He may make of you vessels unto honor, and meet for His service. Today you are to give yourself to God that you may be emptied of self, emptied of envy, jealousy, evil surmising, strife, everything that shall be dishonoring to God. Today you are to have your vessel purified, that it may be ready for the heavenly dew, ready for the showers of the latter rain; for the latter rain will come, and the blessing of God will fall upon

every soul that is purified from every defilement. It is our work today to yield our souls to Christ, that we may be fitted for the time of refreshing from the presence of the Lord—fitted for the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Many statements setting forth the standard that all must reach might be quoted, but we shall take space for only one:

The Great Controversy, p. 623:

Now, while our great High Priest is making the atonement for us, we should seek to become perfect in Christ. Not even by a thought could our Saviour be brought to yield to the power of temptation. Satan finds in human hearts some point where he can gain a foothold; some sinful desire is cherished by means of which his temptations assert their power. But Christ declared of Himself, “The prince of this world cometh and hath nothing in Me.” Satan could find nothing in the Son of God that would enable him to gain the victory. He had kept His Father’s commandments, and there was no sin in Him that Satan could use to his advantage. This is the condition in which those must be found who shall stand in the time of trouble.

Perhaps the scripture text which we use most frequently in speaking of the latter rain is this:

Joel 2

²³ Be glad then, you children of Zion, and rejoice in the Lord your God: for He has 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.

It is said that twice a year much rain fell in Judea—in the beginning of the civil year, in our autumn, and half a year later, in the month of March, just preceding the beginning of the sacred year. Some understand from this that those who prepare for it receive the latter rain, and go out to give the loud cry. Those who then hear the message for the first time and accept it, will have the ministry of the former rain which “causes the seed to germinate.” Thus the former rain will still be falling when the latter rain is poured out.

It is significant that the earnest crying to God, the rending of the heart and not the garments, the weeping between the porch and the altar with supplication and intercession, precedes the falling of the latter rain as promised in *Joel 2:23*. In the past, some of our writers have commented upon the marginal reading of this verse. By putting the marginal reading into the text, we have the following:

“Be glad then, you children of Zion, and rejoice in the Lord your God: for He has given you a teacher of righteousness, according to righteousness, and He will cause to come down for you the rain, the former rain, and the latter rain in the first month.”

This is in harmony with the following statements from the Spirit of prophecy:

Testimonies, vol. 6, p. 19:

The law of God is to be magnified; its claims must be presented in their true, sacred character, that the people may be brought to decide for or against the truth. Yet the work will be cut short in righteousness. The message of Christ's righteousness is to sound from one end of the earth to the other to prepare the way of the Lord. This is the glory of God which closes the work of the third angel.

Testimonies to Ministers, p. 92:

Many had lost sight of Jesus. They needed to have their eyes directed to His divine person, His merits, and His changeless love for the human family. All power is given into His hands that He may dispense rich gifts unto men, imparting the priceless gift of His own righteousness to the helpless human agent. This is the message that God commanded to be given to the world. It is the third angel's message which is to be proclaimed with a loud voice, and attended with the outpouring of His Spirit in a large measure.

The Lord has sent many appeals and admonitions for us to seek this experience.

Testimonies, vol. 8, p. 18:

In obedience to the word of their Master, the disciples as-

sembled in Jerusalem to wait for the fulfillment of God's promise. Here they spent ten days,—days of deep heart searching. They put away all differences, and drew close together in Christian fellowship. At the end of ten days the Lord fulfilled His promise by a wonderful outpouring of His Spirit.

Testimonies to Ministers, p. 64:

We are to pray for the impartation of the Spirit as the remedy for sin-sick souls. The church needs. to be converted, and why should we not prostrate ourselves at the throne of grace, as representatives, of the church, and from a broken heart and contrite spirit make earnest supplication that the Holy Spirit should be poured out upon us from on high.

Many more quotations bearing directly upon the subject of the early and latter rain could be quoted, but perhaps this is sufficient for our purpose. Regrettably it is possible to read important, and even startling, statements again and again without comprehending their significance.

May the Lord help us to heed the instruction and conditions on which the latter rain will finally fall upon the true believers, so clearly and repeatedly set forth in the Spirit of prophecy.