

## **Study Guide #17: The Latter Rain**

### **Introduction**

The heavenly “news” that will trouble the king of the north after its victory over the king of the south (Daniel 11:44) and cause him to go after God’s faithful people will be accompanied by the latter rain of the Holy Spirit. This Study Guide examines the term “latter rain” in this context and in light of the Holy Spirit’s overall purpose and work. [NOTE: See the previous Study Guide on Daniel’s “time of the end.”]

### **Question #1: Did the Holy Spirit work in the days of the Old Testament?**

**Answer:** Yes. God the Holy Spirit has always been available to God’s people after sin entered the world because He is the source of power for people to choose obedience to God. This truth is illustrated in Zechariah 4 by the picturing of 2 olive trees providing oil to light 7 lamps. In other words, it’s the olive oil that gives power to the lamps to produce light. Therefore, when in verse 6, God tells Zerubbabel, the governor of Judea, that he was going to accomplish great things for Him, **“not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit”** (NKJV), He was saying that the olive oil represents the Holy Spirit. If God’s people in the Old Testament were deprived of the Holy Spirit, then God was unfair in expecting obedience to Him, which they would have been powerless to perform. The Holy Spirit also worked with *other* people to woo them to God, a fact testified to by Genesis 6:3: **“My Spirit shall not strive with man forever...”** (NKJV).

### **Question #2: If the Holy Spirit worked in Old Testament times, why does Acts 2 say that He came on the Day of Pentecost?**

**Answer:** The Holy Spirit came upon believers with an obviously new degree of power in Jerusalem at the 1<sup>st</sup> Pentecost (Acts 2) after the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. This was in fulfillment of



Jesus’ promise made to His disciples at His ascension that **“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). Thus, even though the Holy Spirit had literally already been working in their lives, those early Christians received a fuller manifestation of the Spirit that made the time before it seem like they had not possessed Him yet, the contrast was so great. The purpose for this outpouring of the Holy Spirit was primarily to give great supernatural power to their witness for Jesus and win souls for His kingdom. [NOTE: Interestingly, Jesus called this outpouring the baptism of the Holy Spirit in Acts 1:5—indicating that the baptism of the Holy Spirit is not speaking in tongues or some other supernatural ability of the believers. See Explorer II, Study Guides #13 and #14 for discussion of spiritual gifts and the speaking in tongues in particular.]

### Question #3: What Old Testament prophecy did the outpouring of the Spirit on Pentecost fulfill?

**Answer:** The apostle Peter publicly declared on the Day of Pentecost that the events then were a fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel 2:28-32. Peter quotes that prophecy in Acts 2:17-21:

**And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, that I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions, your old men shall dream dreams. And on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days, and they shall prophesy. I will show wonders in heaven above and signs in the earth beneath: blood and fire and vapor of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and notable day of the Lord. And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved (NKJV).**

The prophecy in Joel 2 concerns **“the last days”** just **“before the coming of the great and notable day of the Lord.”** It’s quite clear that the Pentecost experience in Acts 2 was not the literal last days just prior to heaven’s outpouring of judgments on the wicked and the return of the Lord. A closer examination of Joel’s prophecy, and other related statements in the Old Testament, reveals that God’s Word allows for 2 different fulfillments of that prophecy.

### Question #4: What evidence exists that there are two fulfillments for Joel’s prophecy?

**Answer:** Hosea 6:3 gives an example of God coming to His people like rain: **“He [God] will come to us like the rain, Like the latter and former rain to the earth”** (NKJV). Isaiah 32:5 specifically relates the pouring of the Spirit on God’s people to rain that falls on the wilderness and makes it fruitful: **“Until the Spirit is poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness becomes a fruitful field”** (NKJV). Therefore, Joel 2:28-32 also speaks of God’s Spirit being poured out **“on all flesh,”** defined as the sons, daughters, young men, old men, menservants, and maidservants of God’s people (not on the wicked). In this very context, Joel 2:23 refers to the **“former rain, and the latter rain”** (NKJV). In literal agricultural terms, the early or former rains came to Palestine in the fall in order to prepare the ground for the seed, while the latter rains came in the spring in time to put the finishing touches on the ripening crops just before the harvest. The fact that the Old Testament prophets compare God’s coming, including that of the Spirit, to the early and latter rains allows for the interpretation of 2 separate outpourings of God’s Spirit on His people in the Christian Era. Since the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2 didn’t result in the coming of the Lord, that outpouring can be compared to the early rain. Therefore, we have every right to expect that there will be a final outpouring of the Holy Spirit to ripen the spiritual harvest just before the return of Jesus. Such an outpouring can appropriately be called the latter rain of the Holy Spirit.



### Question #5: Will the latter rain be more powerful than the early rain?

**Answer:** Yes, there are at least 2 reasons to believe that the latter rain will be even more overwhelming than the early rain. *First*, in the literal agricultural sense, the latter rains in the spring were greater than the early rains in the fall. *Second*, the entire planet's population will be harvested at the Second Coming of Jesus. And while the large majority will apparently be lost, that's still many more to be saved just before that glorious event than were saved on the Day of Pentecost in Judea. Although the Bible doesn't specifically say this, the miraculous works of the apostles which were heaven's signs that God was with them in the early years of Christianity may well be repeated with even greater volume in the closing days of earth's history as God's signs that He is with that movement.

### Question #6: Who will be ripened for harvest by the latter rain?

**Answer:** Both Joel 2 and Acts 2 make it clear that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit was (early rain) and will be (latter rain) directly upon the *faithful* Christian believers. Some have thereby concluded that it's the believers who will be spiritually ripened by the latter rain. However, that misses the rather obvious point that the purpose for the early and latter rains is to provide spiritual power to the Christian witness so that those who are receptive to the gospel will be converted and harvested for Jesus (i.e., saved) at the end-time. Therefore, those being ripened by the latter rain will be those who accept the heavenly message in the end-time and are harvested for God's kingdom at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming of Jesus. This means that God's movement that proclaims the last-day messages must already be spiritually ripe and ready for heaven before the latter rain falls.

### Question #7: What does it mean to be spiritually ripe for the final harvest?

**Answer:** A careful study of Acts chapters 1 and 2 reveals that the believers who received the early rain of the Holy Spirit underwent a spiritual transformation *before* the Day of Pentecost arrived. We know this by simply recognizing the great contrast among the apostles before and after Pentecost. For example, on the night of Judas' betrayal of Jesus, Peter, James, and John couldn't even stay awake while Jesus prayed (Matthew 26:36-46; Mark 14:32-42; Luke 22:39-46). Peter had denied even knowing Jesus 3 times on the night before Jesus' crucifixion (Matthew 26:69-75; Mark 14:66-72; Luke 22:54-62; John 18:15-17, 25-27). And all of the apostles **"forsook Him and fled"** (Matthew 26:56, NKJV; Mark 14:50) on the same night.



Peter and John Preaching

Finally, on the evening of the resurrection of Jesus, the disciples were shut behind closed doors **"for fear of the Jews"** (John 20:19, NKJV). But by the Day of Pentecost, they all preached openly in the streets of Jerusalem (Acts 2:5). When Peter and John were arrested and bluntly told to stop preaching about Jesus, they boldly responded that **"we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard"** (Acts 4:20, NKJV). Thus, the early believers **"spoke the word with boldness"** (Acts 4:31, NKJV). Clearly, this boldness continued throughout the apostle's lives because Christian historical tradition asserts that all of them except John died a martyr's death for their faith.

No one could argue persuasively that the apostles weren't in a spiritually saved condition before Pentecost. Yet the change in their character was so dramatic in nature that it can best be described as representing good fruit which has been fully ripened and is ready to be harvested. Therefore, being spiritually ripe must include more than being in a saving relationship with Jesus. The apostles' lives shows us that they were so close to Jesus that they would rather die than to knowingly and intentionally be disloyal to Him through disobedience. In other words, they had reached the point of no return in which they could never be persuaded to change their loyalty from Jesus to Satan. They had thereby sealed their spiritual destiny forever by having developed characters of perfect loyalty. [NOTE: See Explorer II, Study Guide #8 for an explanation of the difference between perfectionism and perfection of character. This distinction is crucial, because the former is a distortion of the gospel and puts the focus on the spiritual accomplishments of the believer—something that no genuine believer should ever do. So be aware of the pitfalls of perfectionism even while clinging to the ideal of perfect loyalty.]

### **Question #8: How does a Christian develop a character of perfect loyalty?**

**Answer:** One clue to answering this question is discovered in the history of the apostles. Two events seemed to make the key difference to their transformation of character. *First*, they spent 40 days with Jesus between His resurrection and ascension back to heaven. Jesus' resurrection appearances to His followers energized them beyond all human expectations, as testified by the 2 unknown disciples who exclaimed after spending time with the risen Savior on the road to Emmaus, **“Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road?”** (Luke 24:32, NKJV). *Second*, during the 10 days between Jesus' ascension and Pentecost, the followers of Jesus—about 120 persons, including the apostles—were in the upper room, where they **“all continued with one accord in prayer”** (Acts 1:14, NKJV). This means that these early believers had one purpose or mind, which represented a deep commitment to unity among themselves based on the truth of the gospel.



### **Question #9: Can we summarize what a Christian needs to do in order to develop a character of perfect loyalty?**

**Answer:** In addition to the 2 experiences mentioned under Question #8, the Scriptures instruct us to do at least 2 more things in specific connection with preparing to receive the latter rain of the Holy Spirit. *First*, Zechariah 10:1 admonishes us to **“Ask the Lord for rain in the time of the latter rain”** (NKJV). *Second*, Hosea 6:3 encourages us to **“pursue the knowledge of the Lord...He will come to us like rain, like the latter and former rain to the earth”** (NKJV). Therefore, we can summarize that a Christian needs to do at least 4 vitally important things in order to be prepared to receive the latter rain of the Holy Spirit:

- Earnestly Pray for the Latter Rain experience.
- Pursue the Knowledge of the Lord.
- Spend much time in Contemplation of the Risen Savior.
- Pursue a deep spiritual Bond of Unity among fellow believers in the Church.

### **Question #10: Whose probation closes first in the end-time?**

**Answer:** Although the timing is unknown to the believer, when he reaches the place of perfect loyalty, so that it can never be shaken, he has actually sealed his fate in God's favor and closed his own probation. He is forever saved at that point and also ready for the latter rain of the Holy Spirit. We can therefore conclude that the believers who are part of God's last warning messages to the world will have developed characters of perfect loyalty, so that God can trust them with the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit to aid them mightily in their final proclamation. In other words, probation must close for this last-day Christian movement before it closes for the rest of the world. It will probably require the threat of persecution to shake out those who are only *nominally* a part of God's organized end-time movement, in order that the entire movement will become fully united and ripen into characters of unshakeable loyalty. However, in the meantime, it's the privilege of every individual believer to enjoy a latter rain experience even before the historical latter rain falls on the entire movement.