

## The Latter Rains

by  
Jim Sayles

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 traditional non-Charismatic 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?

If we assume that the revived Philadelphian church represents the “wise virgins” and that the unrepentant Sardis and Laodicean types of church generally represent the “foolish virgins,” what is it that causes the foolish virgins in this troubled time to recognize the obvious manifestation of the Holy Spirit among the wise virgins when the charismata of the present church is largely ignored or criticized?

I have been deeply interested in the accounts of the underground church in China related to me by Jim Hester, an RN and missionary whose medical work with special needs orphans in China, brought him into contact with, and subsequent interaction with the underground church.

Jim, whose mission now includes pastoral and leadership training, as well as personal discipleship of his sons in the faith in the underground church, is filled with joy as he relates the evangelistic zeal, love, and unity of the persecuted underground church.

Under Chairman Mao, the church was heavily persecuted, and most of the founding fathers of the church in China are now martyred or imprisoned. But the faith is spreading rapidly in China these days in many of the same ways that the church spread in the book of Acts, and it is accompanied by many supernatural signs and wonders, including the raising of the dead.

At the same time, Jim is deeply grieved by the condition of the church in America, including the condition of those denominations and fellowships included in the Charismatic movement, because of our obvious immaturity, division and strife, and the fact that we are not corporately manifesting the fullness or the unity and glory of Christ in the world.

Paul’s description of our current condition in his letter to the church at Ephesus is that we are divided and blown around by winds of doctrine and by the deceptions of men who are themselves deceived.

The future condition of the Philadelphian type of church during end time tribulation (as manifested in part by the persecuted underground church in China and other places around the world) is prophetically described as follows:

*His intention was the perfecting and the full equipping of the saints (His consecrated people), [that they should do] the work of ministering toward building up Christ's body (the church),*

*[That it might develop] until...(when?)...(until)... we all attain oneness in the faith and in the comprehension of the [full and accurate]...(experiential)... knowledge of the Son of God, that [we might arrive] at really mature manhood (the completeness of personality which is nothing less than the standard height of Christ's own perfection), the measure of the stature of the fullness of the Christ and the completeness found in Him. Ephesians 4:12,13 Amplified (insert and emphasis is the author's)*

Like Jim, I am deeply grieved over the current condition of the church in America and the western developed nations, but I have the hope given to me by the Lord in His revelation of the meaning of the parable of the ten virgins and the application of the latter rains outpouring of the Spirit on the “wise virgins” after the church is awakened.

As I studied and meditated on the events of the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was poured out on the 120 upper room believers, my attention was drawn to the distinctions between an “early” and a “latter” rain and toward the fact that Joel’s prophecy initially appears to have nothing at all to do with the church.

#### **Joel 2:23 KJV:**

*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...(meaning as in former times, a restoration of the natural rainfall pointing to and illustrating an outpouring of the Spirit as the former and latter rains).*

Note that the context of v. 23 refers forward to vv.27-32.

#### **Joel 2:27-32 KJV:**

*And ye shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am the LORD your God, and none else: and my people shall never be ashamed. ...(to be fulfilled on the day of the Lord)...*

*And it shall come to pass afterward...(in the last days)..., 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 terrible day of the LORD come. ...(Revelation 6:12 – opening of the sixth seal)...*

*And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered: for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the LORD hath said, and in the remnant whom the LORD shall call.*

Keep in mind that the term, “the last days,” refers to the entire church age from the resurrection of Jesus Christ to the day of the Lord. The “end times” or “time of the end” refers to the specific period of time beginning with the return of Israel to national statehood after 1900+ years in Diaspora and ends with the beginning of the eternal age.

No one, apart from the specific revelation of the Spirit of truth, would be 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, Peters revealed 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 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 purposes by the author.)

***“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)

A cursory examination of Joel’s prophecy does not reveal the possibility that this prophecy applies to the church. The prophecy concerns a historical judgment on national Israel for disobedience, resulting in a plague of locusts, and can be viewed as a type of the Lord’s judgment on national Israel during Daniel’s 70<sup>th</sup> week (the “tribulation”) ultimately resulting in the restoration and blessing of spiritual Israel on the day of the Lord.

It is of great interest to me that this passage in Joel cannot possibly be interpreted on its own as applying to the church, and what that presents to us is a paradox. Yet, in Acts 2:14-22 as the Spirit was poured out on the 120 upper room believers we read Peter’s explanation to the crowd as he quoted Joel’s prophesy with this introduction: “...this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel...”

I do not believe that Peter struggled with the paradox, but I do not think he could have anticipated the application of this prophecy to the church prior to the outpouring on the day of Pentecost. It came to him as a direct revelation from the Spirit, and we know, therefore, that the prophecy concerning the outpouring of the Spirit on all flesh (meaning all believing Jews and Gentiles) is for the church as spiritual Israel.

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

1. The promise of the restoration of natural former (fall) and latter (spring) rains to literal Israel points to and illustrates an outpouring of the Spirit on spiritual Israel (the church) as both the former and the latter rains to bring in the complete harvest.
2. The outpouring of the Spirit on spiritual Israel as both the former (fall) and latter (spring) rains will be completed before the opening of the 6<sup>th</sup> seal of Revelation (when the sun is turned into darkness and the moon is turned into blood).

3. “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.
4. We know by context that it is a progressive outpouring beginning on the day of Pentecost and continuing, first as the early rains, and then as the latter rains.

What this means, contrary to the opinion of many, is that there is no specific prophetic discontinuance of the outpouring from beginning to end, only a difference in the volume of the outpouring as it parallels the natural rainfall patterns in Israel.

And it should be of interest to us that the outpouring of the Spirit as “signs and wonders” and as manifested gifts of the Spirit (*charismata*), has been demonstrated historically in the great revivals of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries as well as the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Likewise, it is demonstrated in the persecuted underground church in various countries around the world.

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 early rains or as the heavy latter spring 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.

The institutional church, too, was largely ignored in the great revivals of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

If we examine the text of Joel 2:23-31 carefully we will find that the promise of restoration covers two distinct time frames, first as distinct early seed germinating rains (fall) rains and secondly as distinct latter harvest producing (spring) rains.

What are we to say then concerning this prophecy of early and late rains? The context suggests that they concern both a natural restoration and a spiritual restoration. And an examination of the text in Joel suggests that an ongoing natural and spiritual outpouring will continue to be fulfilled during the millennial kingdom.

But the fulfillment of the prophecy related to the outpouring of the Spirit, which began on the day of Pentecost, the day the church was born, will, by context, necessarily be fulfilled completely prior to the day of the Lord as an outpouring on the church..

<b>Early Rains</b>	<b>Latter Rains</b>
Early seed germinating outpouring of the Spirit on the 120 upper room believers on the day of Pentecost, the beginning of the church, the holy remnant of the kingdom, spiritual Israel	The latter, harvest producing outpouring of the Spirit on spiritual Israel, the church, for the purpose of bringing in the final harvest of tribulation souls.

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 the “early” fall rains for the purpose of germinating the seed of the newborn church of Jesus Christ (spiritual Israel). And, on that basis, we could expect an 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.

Joel’s prophecy states that the early and latter rains would be reinstated *as before*. We assume that this refers to the physical rainfall patterns in Israel, but, because Joel is specifically using the parallel between the physical restoration of Israel and the spiritual restoration of all mankind in Christ, we must assume these could take place as outpourings of the Spirit on the church as early, seed germinating, and latter, harvest producing, rains.

But what 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 is that there is a period of lesser rainfall between the early seed germinating rains and the beginning of the latter harvest producing rains.

We believe that a limited outpouring of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost did, in fact, take place. But what about the restoration of the latter rains *as before*, the heavy rains that ripen the crop for harvest? James says the Lord is keeping a patient vigil over the land until it receives both the early and late rains before He comes to meet both His living and dead saints in the clouds on “the last day.”

Now why is it that we can believe that the outpouring of the Spirit came upon the early church, but we have trouble believing that an outpouring of the Spirit as the “latter rains” could take place in our day?

**As Peter said that the beginning of the Joel’s prophecy was being fulfilled on that day (the first day of the church), that day must also have been the start of the restored former (early) rains with the start of the restored latter spring rains coming at some future date prior to the day of the Lord.**

A period of lesser rainfall between the former and latter 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 the interim period.

It is also important to notice that the 120 in the upper room “all joined together constantly

in prayer..." before the Holy Spirit came as the early rain. So what does that tell us? It tells us that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit came in response to the fervent effectual prayers of the 120. It also tells us that the church, at some point, stopped praying for the rain, and that we, the last days harvest generation, need to be joined together constantly in prayer again for the latter rains.

However, it is my belief that we will not do this corporately until we hear the groomsman's voice saying, "**Behold, the Bridegroom!**," which takes place progressively after the opening of the first seal (Revelation 6:1,2).

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 latter rains on the remnant church, 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 latter 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 pride of their own intellects, will cause them to be offended, to stumble and, eventually, fall away from the faith.

But there will be a holy remnant who will receive an outpouring of the Spirit as the latter, 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:

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 rain)...***

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

***Arise, shine; for your light has come,***

***And the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.***

***For behold, darkness will cover the earth***

***And deep darkness the peoples;***

*But the LORD will rise upon you  
And His glory will appear upon you. Isaiah 60:1,2 NASB*