

Sabbath, 6 June 2015, 9:00 a.m.

To Ripen the Grain for the Harvest

Introduction. Today we will first revisit the day and events of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was poured out on our Lord's disciples, and the apostle Peter stood up to deliver a mighty reaping message. We call that the early rain. Then we must consider the latter rain, another great outpouring of the Holy Spirit which awaits us, hopefully in the near future. It is to be even mightier and more abundant than on the day of Pentecost. The latter rain will bring with it an abundance of spiritual gifts. But its main purpose will be to finish the work of saving souls for Jesus before he comes again.

1. Both an Early and a Latter Rain. During his life on earth, the Lord Jesus used water as a symbol of the Holy Spirit, which he gives to those who sincerely believe in him. It engenders eternal life. (John 7:37-39.) For the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the Bible uses the image of falling water, rain. Two ancient prophets predicted it. As before, I quote from the NKJV.

We read of it in Zechariah, the second last book of the Old Testament, where he said: "Ask the Lord for Rain/In the time of the latter rain" (Zech. 10:1). Before him, Joel had rejoiced:

Be glad then, you children of Zion
And rejoice in the Lord your God;
For He has given you the former rain faithfully,
And He will cause the rain to come down for you—
The former rain,
And the latter rain in the first month.
The threshing floors shall be full of wheat,
And the vats shall overflow with new wine and oil.

(Joel 2:23, 24)

2. The Main Events at Pentecost. As Jesus had instructed them, the disciples waited for the Holy Spirit, spending their time together. They had great personal needs and also had to be equipped to preach the Gospel with greater power. During those days, they searched their souls and consciences, where necessary made things right with their brothers and sisters in the faith, and came close to God. When the outpouring came, they were all of one accord.

In the second chapter of Acts, we read how they were together. A sound from heaven, like a mighty rushing wind, was suddenly heard. They saw tongues of fire descend on them, and each of them spoke languages that were not their own. A large crowd heard the sound and rushed together. Among them were many Jews whose home language was not Aramaic. They hailed from other countries as far afield as Egypt, Libya, Mesopotamia, Persia, Crete, Arabia, and Rome. To their amazement, they heard themselves addressed in their mother tongue, by Galileans!

These were real languages, not some unknown alleged tongues. But why? The Holy Spirit from that time onward imbued the Church with many gifts. One of them that proved to be very valuable was divine healing. But an even greater need was to preach the Gospel in

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people's own language. Many of those to whom the disciples wanted to proclaim the Good News knew Koine Greek, the Lingua Franca of the time. Was this not good enough? No, for God it was not. He wanted people to hear about salvation through Jesus in their own languages. Since the disciples did not know them, the Holy Spirit supernaturally gave them the ability to speak and understand them. Let us remember this and also know that nowadays 80 or 90 percent of the people on this planet do not understand English. They speak more than six thousand language. It is therefore foolish to think that we can reach the whole world through English television.

2.1 The Apostle's Explanation. The crowd was confused. Among them were those who mocked and accused the disciples of being drunk. At that point, Peter stood up to tell them what was happening. No, they were not intoxicated; it was too early in the morning for that to be the case. It was, instead, the marvelous fulfillment of a prophecy, which he quoted from Joel. I am now going to read this to you, but not from the Book of Acts, but directly from the Old Testament:

And it shall come to pass afterward
That I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh;
Your sons and your daughters shall prophecy,
Your old men shall dream dreams,
Your young men shall see visions,
And also on My menservants
 and on My maidservants
I will pour out My Spirit in those days.

And I will show 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 coming of the great and awesome
 day of the Lord.
And it shall come to pass
That whoever calls on the name of the LORD
 shall be saved.

(Joel 2:28-32)

2.2 Partial Fulfillment. Not all of that prophecy was fulfilled in apostolic times. The Lord's Return still lay in the distant future, though this fact was concealed from the disciples. They had asked him about this just before his ascension, but he said: "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority." But he promised that they would receive the Holy Spirit, who would enable them to proclaim the Gospel powerfully throughout the world. (Acts 1:7, 8) The Great Dark Day when the sun would for hours be blotted out with a blood-red moon in the subsequent night would only come in 1780. For the

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early disciples to have known how many years would have to pass before the Second Coming would have greatly discouraged them.

2.3 The Prophetic Gift Plentiful in New Testament Times. Apart from tongues, one part of Joel's prediction was abundantly fulfilled in Peter's day: Sons and daughters would prophesy, old men would dream dreams, young men would see visions. The Holy Spirit would also be poured out on Christian slaves. In addition to the Apostles, we read of other prophets. Writing to the church at Corinth, the apostle Paul described a large number of gifts that the Holy Spirit would impart (1 Cor. 12:4-11). He spoke out against the abuse of tongues (1 Cor. 14) but especially lauded prophecy, which he said all those believers should desire (vs. 1). The book of Acts records that this gift was abundantly present in apostolic times. Prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch, where the believers were first called Christians. One of them was named Agabus. He foretold a great famine (Acts 12:27). Years later, Paul was in Caesarea, back from his third missionary journey, traveling toward Jerusalem. He stayed over in the home of Philip, one of the seven Deacons, now called Philip the Evangelist. He had four unmarried daughters who had the prophetic gift. While Paul was there, the same prophet Agabus came from Jerusalem with a warning from the Holy Spirit to warn the apostle against going up to Jerusalem. The message was that the Jews would deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles. (Acts 21:8-11) He went anyway, and we know what happened afterwards. But my point is that in the early Church there were prophets aplenty, both men and women.

2.4 Only One Prophet for the Remnant Church? This prompts me to ask: "Why has the Seventh-day Adventist Church had only one prophet in more than 170 years? According to Rev. 12:17, the Spirit of Prophecy, along with keeping God's Holy Law, identifies the Remnant Church. But is it just a synonym for Ellen G. White? I must really deal with this before returning to Peter speaking at Pentecost.

Our denominational history shows that many Seventh-day Adventists have disliked the very idea of a post-Biblical prophet. We have also had a fine crop of false claimants to this office. Protestants also poke fun at it. Most of them believe that after the New Testament canon was completed, the prophetic office ceased, though this is something that they cannot prove. In fact, Rev. 12:17 disproves it. Of course, the Mormons always have a living "prophet," and—so does the Roman Church. Who? The Pope. He is supposed to speak infallibly on behalf of the Lord, although he cannot effectively foretell the future. This fact is his Achilles heel, as it is of Mormon prophets.

Ellen White has, on several occasions, made strikingly correct predictions, as we can demonstrate by comparing her recorded words with actual effects. Among other things, she foretold the course of the American civil war, the great San Francisco earthquake, destructive warfare in the twentieth century, and developments in the religious world that we have witnessed over the past sixty years. Nevertheless, the question returns. Is the Spirit of Prophecy for the Remnant really limited to one person?

I think not, for several reasons.

First, we have had instances of supernatural revelations to other Seventh-day Adventists. For instance, one night the Lord made Annie Smith dream of entering an evangelistic meeting. There was only one empty chair. As she sat down in it, the speaker said: "Unto two

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thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed.” In the same night, Joseph Bates dreamt that he was the speaker at an evangelistic meeting. As he rose to speak, he saw a young woman enter and sit down in the only empty chair. And so it happened. When the time came, Annie Smith came into the meeting, sat down in the only still empty chair, and saw Joseph Bates, whom she recognized from her dream. He arose and said: “Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed,” as is written in Dan. 8:14. She accepted that message and was a faithful Seventh-day Adventist until the day of her death.

Were Annie Smith and Joseph Bates prophets? No, but at that time the Spirit of prophecy was manifested. And over our history many of our people have had similar, striking experiences.

In a minor way, I have also had one. In the 1970s, I was asked to preach a Sabbath sermon in Port Elizabeth, South Africa, at a large church where I was an elder. For a week, I wrestled with my topic until the Friday evening. I just could not make up my mind, so I decided to re-preach an old sermon for which I still had the notes, and then fell asleep. But very early on the Sabbath morning I woke up to hear a clear voice saying in my mind: “The time of the end. Speak about the time of the end.” And my mind was directed to the prophecies of Daniel. I got up and wrote my notes, which came to me rapidly. It was such an unusual experience that I told the congregation about it at the beginning of my sermon. Afterwards, when I stood at the door as the congregation was filing out, a woman whom I did not recognize shook my hand and said: “That message was for me!” I then suggested that she should obtain Uriah Smith’s book, *Daniel and the Revelation*. At that moment, a smiling Br. Andrews, our colporteur walked up to us and said he would get it for her. Unbeknown to me, he had been giving Bible studies to her and her husband.

What was that all about? I will let you decide. And note that I do not claim to be a prophet or the son of a prophet. But do remember that prophecy is not necessarily about foretelling the future. It is authentically speaking for God. Many of our ministers could tell similar stories. We must, moreover, distinguish between occasional and frequent manifestations of this gift.

Also, some prophets, like Agabus and Philip’s daughters—like several mentioned in the Old Testament—have left no writings. Another distinction is between such messengers for the Lord and full-time professional prophets, who also wrote books, like Isaiah, Jeremiah, and . . . Ellen G. White.

Will our Church have another prophet or prophets before Jesus comes? We do not know, but this is not impossible. I can tell you, though, that such a person or people would face immediate and terrible opposition, especially if he or she speaks out against many forms of apostasy in our midst. And he, she, or they may not write very much, but mostly point us back to the writings of Ellen G. White, and ask insistently: “Why do you not read her books? And, why do you not believe what the Lord has revealed through her?”

Related to the giving of prophecy is its interpretation. Peter wrote: “We have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet. 1:19, 20). That is, the giving of prophecy is from above. But explaining it correctly also depends on the Holy

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Spirit. Catholicism, together with Protestant churches that seek an alliance with it, while teaching false doctrines, will not understand or be able to correctly interpret the prophecies. And that, I believe, is why some denominations have rejected Historicism and prefer Idealism as well as Preterism and Futurism, i.e., Dispensationalism.

3. Personal Salvation and the Holy Spirit. We have touched on the gifts of the Holy Spirit. But even more important for us as individual human beings is his role in our salvation. Jesus discussed it during a night interview with Nicodemus. He told this learned man of God's great love for the world, revealing that "he gave us his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). This is wonderful. But Jesus also said to Nicodemus something else, of which I must remind you now: "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). Most modern Bibles say "born *again*," but in the original we have: "ἐὰν μὴ τις γεννηθῆ ἀνωθεν" [ean mē tis gennēthē; anōthen]. That is, unless somebody is born **anōthen**, he or she cannot see the kingdom of God, cannot be saved. What does **anōthen** signify? It can be translated "again," but it mostly means "from above." To be born again is to be born from above, through the Holy Spirit. Yes, we need by faith to accept forgiveness for our sins, but the Lord also wants us to obtain victory over sin. Jesus clearly said to Nicodemus and says to us: "Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." (John 3:5, 6)

By ourselves we cannot do this. We totally need help. Paul discusses our dilemma in Romans 7 and 8. The Law of God demands obedience, but because of our perverted nature, we cannot keep it. Nevertheless, our Heavenly Father has provided a remedy, through Jesus who died for us, as well as the Holy Spirit. This is how the great apostle put it: "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin; He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit." (Rom. 8:1-4) What, in this context, does the word *flesh* mean? It is our ordinary human nature, including even our minds. My brethren and sisters, those are very deep words. They contain the very essence of righteousness by faith, not only justification by faith, but righteousness by faith. That is, God who loves us wants to forgive all the sins that we have committed, but he also wants to change our nature by Christ who must live within us through God the Holy Spirit.

There is another wonderful Pauline passage about this topic, in Eph. 2:1-10. Often people quote only one of those verses: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast" (Eph. 2:8). Now, that is true, but by itself it is an incomplete gospel. Those words should be read in context. Look at what precedes and also what follows them. The chapter starts with the following words: "And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once

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conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. (Eph. 2:1-3) Note the word *works*. The devil works in people to make them disobedient. But the next four verses fill us with hope: “But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.” (Eph. 2:3-7) After that, we find the wonderful verse: “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast” (Eph. 2:8). Again note the word *works* and ask: “Whose works?” Well, our defective works, prompted by human nature—and, beyond that, by the working of Satan. But the next verse says: “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10). Whose workmanship? God’s workmanship, in contrast with the devil’s work in the children of disobedience. This links up well with the first four verses of Romans with which I have dealt. We need full salvation, forgiveness of as well as victory over sin. Involved in this is the entire holy Trinity. We need the Father’s love, we need the Saviour’s death and indwelling, and we need the Holy Spirit, the Early Rain that fell abundantly at Pentecost, and of which we must still partake. We must obtain life everlasting **anōthen**, from above. We must be born through the water of baptism as well as the Holy Spirit. And he will provide the fruitage, the gifts of a life acceptable to God. Because my time is limited, I cannot now dwell on them but do point out that the greatest of these is love, a deep and abiding love for God and for our fellow human beings, both in and outside our Church. And therefore we must share with everybody the everlasting Gospel and the message that Jesus is coming soon, to take us all to his kingdom. And this brings us back to Peter speaking on the day of Pentecost.

4. The Main Message of Pentecost. Peter first explained about the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Then, as mentioned before, he quoted a passage from Joel, ending with the words: “. . . the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD. And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved” (Acts 2:20, 21). Thereupon he plunged headlong into his main message: “Men of Israel, hear these words. Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know—Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death . . .”

All this was absolutely true and fitted perfectly into recent events. But look at how terribly confrontational he was! He accused his audience of murdering the Messiah. Dale Carnegie, who wrote that famous book *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, would not have approved. And, if we were in Peter’s place, would we have used that approach? He was taking on Orthodox Jews as well as the Scribes and the Pharisees. Likewise, should we preach the Three Angels’ Messages and confront not only the papacy but, by implication, also most of the Protestant establishment in America? Please just remember Peter’s approach was inspired by the Holy Spirit.

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But he did not stop there. After mentioning the crucifixion of Jesus, Peter continued: “whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it.” He referred to King David’s prophecies in the Psalms that the Lord, his descendant, who he knew would sit on his throne was to be resurrected. Also: “This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear.” (Acts 2:24-33) After a few more words, Peter finished this part of his powerful discourse as follows: “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ” (vs. 36). At this point, he stopped and waited for his hearers to react.

“Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Men and brethren, what shall we do?’ Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit . . .” (Acts 2:37-39)

What were the results? On this day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit fell as the early rain, about three thousand repentant Jews accepted their Messiah and were baptized. Afterwards, as the apostles continued their ministry even more people were added to the infant Church. Further chapters show, of course, how angrily the Sanhedrin reacted. The chief perpetrators in having Jesus crucified did not accept him. Instead, they persecuted the heralds of salvation.

This is what we will also experience, if we correctly proclaim the Three Angels’ Messages, which for some of our people have become so unpopular. We, too, if we are controlled by the Holy Spirit, will see glorious results for our labors. But, be warned, we will also be hated and persecuted by those who reject our proclamation.

Against that background let us now consider:

5. The Latter Rain. This is what the end-time outpouring of the Holy Spirit is called. It is insightful to see what the Servant of the Lord had to say about it. She wrote a good deal about the former as well as the latter rain. An excellent compilation from her writings can be found on the Internet. This is called *The Former and the Latter Rain* by E. G. White. She compared these outpourings and stated that we as Christians must experience both.

5.1 A Prerequisite. She stressed the necessity for all believers to receive the former rain, which is a prerequisite for the latter rain. Here is part of what she said, from TM 506-509:

“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. The work that God has begun in the human heart in giving His light and knowledge must be continually going forward. Every individual must realize his own necessity. The heart must be emptied of every defilement, and cleansed for the indwelling of the Spirit . . .”

Also: “As we seek God for the Holy Spirit, it will work in us meekness, humbleness of mind, a conscious dependence upon God for the perfecting latter rain. If we pray for the blessing in faith, we shall receive it as God has promised.”

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5.2 An Illustrative Incident in the Book of Acts. “And it happened, while Apollos was at Corinth, that Paul, having passed through the upper regions, came to Ephesus. And finding some disciples, he said to them, ‘Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?’ So they said to him, ‘We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit.’ And he said to them, ‘Into what then were you baptized?’ So they said, ‘Into John’s baptism.’ Then Paul said, ‘John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.’ When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied.” (Acts 19:1-6)

My dear brethren and sisters, let me also ask you: “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed and were baptized?” If not, you have not yet experienced the early rain and need to do something about it. I am not suggesting that God the Holy Spirit will give the same evidence as he did at Ephesus. But we all need the early rain. And, ministers, when you baptize people do you pray for them to receive the Holy Spirit? If you do not, you are not following Paul’s example.

5.3 Two More Quotations. Here are two more, tantalizing statements by Ellen G. White:

“The great work of the gospel is not to close with less manifestation of the power of God than marked its opening. The prophecies which were fulfilled in the outpouring of the former rain at the opening of the gospel are again to be fulfilled in the latter rain at its close. Here are ‘the times of refreshing’ to which the apostle Peter looked forward when he said: ‘Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; and he shall send Jesus.’ Acts 3:19, 20. The work will be similar to that of the Day of Pentecost. (GC 611-612)

“It is with an earnest longing that I look forward to the time when the events of the day of Pentecost shall be repeated with even greater power than on that occasion. John says, ‘I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with his glory.’ Then, as at the Pentecostal season, the people will hear the truth spoken to them, every man in his own tongue. . . . Thousands of voices will be imbued with the power to speak forth the wonderful truths of God’s Word. The stammering tongue will be unloosed, and the timid will be made strong to bear courageous testimony to the truth. May the Lord help His people to cleanse the soul temple from every defilement, and to maintain such a close connection with Him that they may be partakers of the latter rain when it shall be poured out. (SDABC, EGW’s comments on Acts 2:1-4, p. 1035)

5.4 What Will Happen at Second Pentecost? Three things. First, the Holy Spirit will be manifested with even greater power than in the former rain. Second, “the people will hear the truth spoken to them, every man in his own tongue.” Does this mean that the Lord’s people will again have the gift of tongues, that is, a supernatural ability to speak foreign languages? That statement seems to suggest it. Third, the Latter Rain experience is linked with the message of the Fourth Angel depicted in Revelation 18. Like Peter’s sermon at Pentecost, the

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Remnant people who will say with a mighty voice: “Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen” and will with terrible clarity describe corruptions that now prevail in the apostate churches, Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox. Another voice, the voice of the Father or of Jesus, will be added, saying: “Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues” (Rev. 18:4).

Our enemies and all ecumenically minded people will consider this very offensive, and so will many cultural Seventh-day Adventists. But many of the Lord’s people, who are still in Babylon, will hear and leave their fallen churches to join the Remnant. Fierce persecution will also follow. There will also be a death decree against Sabbathkeepers, but God will not allow their extermination. At that point probation will close, the seven last plagues will strike the earth, and soon the Lord Jesus will return.

Conclusion. Dear brethren and sisters, have you received the early rain? If not, please talk to the Lord about it, confess and by his enabling power put away your sins, put things right between yourselves and others, prepare your hearts, and earnestly plead for the Holy Spirit. This is a gift which our heavenly father is eager to bestow. Then also pray earnestly for the latter rain, which will ripen an abundant harvest for the kingdom. You will then be part of it. You must also help to proclaim and Three Angels’ Messages fearlessly, so that Jesus will come. Remember what I said in my first presentation: “The Lord is coming. Are you ready?” and “The Lord is ready. Are you coming?”