

THE EARLY RAIN AND THE LATTER RAIN

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“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.” Zechariah 10:1. “He will cause to come down for you the rain, the former rain, and the latter rain.” Joel 2:23.

“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.

“There is to be ‘first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear.’ There must be a constant development of Christian virtue, a constant advancement in Christian experience. This we should seek with intensity of desire, that we may adorn the doctrine of Christ our Saviour.”¹

In the fourth chapter of Zechariah there are some golden truths with regard to the early and latter rain of the Holy Spirit whereby God's people may be greatly encouraged. In this fifth vision Zechariah's accompanying angel awakens him to probe Zechariah's understanding and explain the visions. “And the angel that talked with me came again, and waked me, as a man that is wakened out of his sleep.” Zech. 4:1.

¹ Ellen G. White, “Pray for the Latter Rain,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* (March 2, 1897).

He was shown a menorah which was unlike any that had previously adorned the wilderness tabernacle or Solomon's temple. "And said unto me, What seest thou? And I said, I have looked, and behold a candlestick all of gold, with a bowl upon the top of it, and his seven lamps thereon, and seven pipes to the seven lamps, which are upon the top thereof." Zech. 4:2. It has a single support trunk resembling a tree with a bowl at its crown. From the bowl are seven conduit channels flowing outward to seven lamps which receive their support from the main trunk.

Previous menorah's, in the tabernacle and temple, featured a main trunk with six side branches supporting lamps, three to a side; and the main trunk crowned with a lamp. An additional, unique feature of Zechariah's menorah was the two olive trees. "And two olive trees by it, one upon the right side of the bowl, and the other upon the left side thereof." Zech. 4:3. These olive trees are overarching the menorah and remind us of the tree of life.

Zechariah is fully engaged in the visual representation and asks questions of clarification that any observer would want answered. "So I answered and spake to the angel that talked with me, saying, What are these, my lord?" Zech. 4:4.

The interpreting angel emphasizes the prophet's lack of understanding regarding the vision by asking a question. "Then the angel that talked with me answered and said unto me, Knowest thou not what these be? And I said, No, my lord." Zech. 4:5. Thus Zechariah admits his complete dependence upon the divine agent to reveal to him the meaning of the vision.

In the angel interpret response we have the answer as to how the kingdom of God is to be established; how the temple of the Lord is to be rebuilt; and how the work of God is to be completed on earth. "Then he answered and spake unto me, saying, This is the word of the LORD unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts." Zech. 4:6. Not by the arm of man, now by human authority, but by God's Spirit will the work commence and be completed. This is the promised early and latter rain. And so the vision begins in the time of Zechariah and carries us down to the end of time when the earth is lightened by the glory of God.

But the work will not be accomplished without much opposition. The enemy of all souls seeks to absorb them into his kingdom as the prince of this world. He aspires to assault the very mountain top

where God holds His government. “For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High.” Isa. 14:13, 14. God’s great mountain—Har Megiddon—is opposed by Satan’s anti-Har Megiddon. The following question raises the spectre of threat which Satan’s attempted coupe poses to God’s government. “Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain.” Zech. 4:7. Those four horns (Zech. 1:18) are the heathen (Zech. 1:21) which Satan hopes to use down through the centuries to overwhelm God’s people and thus defeat His government.

However, there is to be a final showdown in an all-out battle for the mountaintop government of God in which the challenger will be faced with a cataclysmic defeat. His amassed forces gathered from both churches and states will meet their end in the battle of Armageddon (Rev. 16:16).

God assured Zerubbabel that he should finish the house, and to encourage his faith he compared Christ and the seven spirits of God to a plummet in his hand. Compare Zech. 3:9; 4:10. He said also that when the head-stone should be put in its place to finish the temple, such would be the beauty of the edifice that the people would cry, “Grace, grace unto it.” Zech. 4:7-10.

Zerubbabel was of the Davidic dynasty. As the representative of King David he was divinely authorized to rebuild the temple. “Moreover the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it; and thou shalt know that the LORD of hosts hath sent me unto you.” Zech 4:8, 9. Zerubbabel was in the line of descendants from David in fulfillment of the promise that David would not lack for a descendant to sit upon his throne. He was a type of Christ to come who would build the true temple. His temple would be a Spirit-people-temple, such as was envisaged in the royal mandate. Christ received his royal commission in the eternal covenant with the Father and as agent of the Spirit he carries out the holy building task in his administration of the new covenant.

God’s challenge to the hostile world, “Who are you?” (v. 7), is issued at a time when the covenant community is outwardly weak. The world mountain towers over them. The restoration of the temple on Zion is just beginning (cf. Hag. 2:3). This is reflected in the parallel

challenging question of verse 10: “For who hath despised the day of small things? for they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel with those seven; they are the eyes of the LORD, which run to and fro through the whole earth.” God’s challenge sets the stage for the announcement of a total reversal on both sides; not only will the high world mountain be brought low but lowly Zion will be exalted—Zerubbabel will complete the temple of heavenly glory (cf. Hag. 2:9). God will shake heaven and earth.

The sevenfold Spirit signifies that the Lord has authorized the enterprise, that he takes special interest and pleasure in it, and by his Spirit is sovereignly supervising it—the guarantee of success. Again the universal dimensions of the temple project are emphasized. The Holy Spirit is ranging throughout the earth in His reconnaissance work of gathering souls into the project of God’s kingdom temple construction.

The concluding words of verse 7b, “Grace, grace” have been understood as a public acclamation such as might attend the completion of a project (cf. 2 Sam. 6:15), in the present case, the closing ceremonies dedicating the temple (cf. 2 Chr. 7:4-6). The exclamation, “Grace, grace,” would be appropriate to such an occasion whether interpreted as praise of the beauty of the edifice or petition for God’s continuing blessing on the temple (cf. 1 Kgs. 8:29, 43).

Zechariah asks the question “What are these two olive trees upon the right side of the candlestick and upon the left side thereof?” Zech. 4:11.

“And I answered again, and said unto him, What be these two olive branches which through the two golden pipes empty the golden oil out of themselves?” Zech. 4:12. His double question lays emphasis upon the “flowing (or deep) stream” which is so prominently issuing forth from the two trees. As they pour out their golden oil through the channels the olive trees become olive oil rivers. The picture is the merging images of the tree of life and the river of life.

The two olive trees were unlike any olive trees known to man; for all olive trees produce berries, from which men make oil by beating them fine; but these trees produced oil alone, and poured that oil through golden tubes into the bowl upon the top of the candlestick. Man had nothing to do with the preparation of the oil which supplies these lamps. The oil flowed direct from the trees into the bowl, and thence into the lamps.

This highly unusual process for producing olive oil would be unrecognizable by Zechariah. He had never seen olive trees like this before. "And he answered me and said, Knowest thou not what these be? And I said, No, my lord." Zech. 4:13.

The two olive trees, according to Zech. 4:6, must signify the word of God, or the Holy Scriptures; for when the prophet demanded the signification of his vision, the angel answered: "This is the word of the Lord unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." This vision signifies the word of the Lord addressed to Zerubbabel. Zerubbabel had commenced to build the temple of the Lord; but so great was the poverty of the people, and so powerful were the adversaries that opposed the work, that it seemed impossible that he should ever complete the building. His circumstances were exactly the opposite of those of Solomon when the first temple was built; for the riches of Solomon were immense, and he had no adversaries. When, therefore, the olive trees produced oil instead of berries, and poured that oil without human intervention into the lamps, it was to teach Zerubbabel that God could do his work without the aid of man, or, what is the same thing, that he could do that work when the resources of his people were very feeble, and the work itself very great.

Yet this vision clearly indicates that there is a work for the servants of God to do, however feeble they may be. The candlestick itself could give no light, but it could hold up the bowl with its seven lamps, and these could illuminate the world. The candlestick must therefore represent the church of God. We read, "The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches." Rev. 1:20.

The office of the Church is to hold up Christ and the truth in the sight of men. Thus the Church, which has no light in itself, is able to be the light of the world. Matt. 5:14-16; Phil. 2:15. Christ is the central object in this vision, for he is the Alpha and the Omega of the Old and New Testaments. Rev. 1:8; 22:13. In him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, and in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. Col. 2:3, 9,

The two olive trees standing on each side of Christ, must represent the two divisions of the word of God, the law and the gospel, or the Old Testament and the New. The oil which flows from these trees

signifies the truths of the Bible. The Scriptures testify of Christ. John 5:39. The two divisions of the word of God meet in Christ even as the two golden pipes from the two olive trees poured the oil into the golden bowl. The seven spirits as seven lamps give light to the world, but they do it by means of the truths of the Bible; and these truths have their center in Christ, as the seven lamps have their center in the golden bowl. Thus the church, or golden candlestick, is the light of the world by means of the truths which the Spirit of God draws from the Bible through Christ.

It is remarkable that the angel seems unwilling to give a full explanation of this vision to Zechariah See verses 4, 5, 11-14. But we now know the reason. There is to be a later revelation on this subject made in the New Testament. This well illustrates the fact that our knowledge of the truth is drawn from two sources, the Old Testament and the New, even as the oil was produced by two olive trees. The angel closed this vision by saying: "These are the two anointed ones, that stand by the Lord of the whole earth." Zech. 4:14.

About five hundred years after this, the attention of John was called to this subject, probably by the same angel, in words very similar to those which he addressed to Zechariah: "These are the two olive trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth." Rev. 11:4. Now two candlesticks are seen instead of one. This is because the New Testament church had arisen, though in truth but one church existed in the time of John; for the church of the Old Testament gave place to that of the New when the latter arose. But it is proper always to speak of two olive trees, for the New Testament has existed in truth ever since God began to pardon sin. One of the old Fathers says: "In the Old Testament the New Testament lies concealed; in the New Testament the Old Testament lies open."

God calls these two olive trees his two witnesses. Rev. 11:3, 4. These witnesses bear testimony to his will concerning our duty in the law, and they bear testimony to his power to save us from sin by the gospel. They also threaten men with death by fire if they refuse to repent. Rev. 11:5. Their word by the mouth of Elijah shut heaven that it should not rain (1 Kings 17), and their word by the mouth of Moses turned the waters of Egypt to blood, and inflicted the ten plagues. Rev. 11:6; Ex. 7:12.

The angel said, "Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain." Zech. 4:7. This signified that if Zerubbabel would have faith in God, the immense difficulties which

stood in the way of his success in building the temple, should all be removed. This case illustrates the meaning of the declaration of Christ concerning the removal of mountains by our faith. Matt. 21:21.

Ellen White quotes Zechariah's (chap. 4) prophecy in a discussion of the early and latter rain, and completion of the temple. Her article is entitled, "Pray for the Latter Rain." She says, "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. Then the human agent had only to ask for the blessing, and wait for the Lord to perfect the work concerning him. It is God who began the work, and he will finish his work, making man complete in Jesus Christ. But there must be no neglect of the grace represented by the former rain. Only those who are living up to the light they have, will receive greater light."²

The early rain was the outpouring of the Spirit upon the church on the day of Pentecost. When might the church expect the latter rain?

As far back as 1882 Ellen White had warned that they might someday be unable to recognize the true Holy Spirit:

"Many of you cannot discern the work and presence of God. . . . There are men among us in responsible positions who hold that . . . such a faith as that of Paul, Peter, or John, is . . . old fashioned, and insufferable at the present time. It is pronounced absurd, mystical, and unworthy of an intelligent mind." (5T 74, 79).

A false optimism prevailed ("I know that many think far too favorably of the present time" (5T 80), and "in the mighty sifting soon to take place," (5T 79) these leading workers could be found unfit for crisis-era leadership:

"Those who have trusted to intellect, genius, or talent, will not then stand at the head of rank and file. They did not keep pace with the light. Those who have proved themselves unfaithful will not then be entrusted with the flock. In the last solemn work, few great men will be engaged." (5T 80).

² Ellen G. White, "Pray for the Latter Rain," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* (March 2, 1897), par. 4.

Ellen White had looked forward to the time when the Lord would take leadership into His own hands and raise up human instruments whom He could trust:

“When we have men as devoted as Elijah, and possessing the faith which he possessed, we shall see that God will reveal Himself to us as He did to holy men of old. When we have men, who, while they acknowledge their deficiencies, will plead with God in earnest faith, as did Jacob, we shall see the same results.” (4T 402).

Specifically, the General Conference president in 1885 was warned that unless he and some others are aroused to a sense of their duty, they will not recognize the work of God when the loud cry of the third angel shall be heard. “When light goes forth to lighten the earth, instead of coming up to the help of the Lord, they will want to bind about His work to meet their narrow ideas. Let me tell you that the Lord will work in this last work in a manner very much out of the common order of things, and in a way that will be contrary to any human planning. . . . The workers will be surprised by the simple means that He will use to bring about and perfect His work of righteousness.” (October 1, 1885; TM 300).

That letter was addressed to both G. I. Butler and S. N. Haskell. Haskell heeded the warning and was one of the few who had the discernment to recognize the mysterious thing that was happening before his eyes three years later. But not Butler and many others. The Lord would be forced in 1888 to pass by experienced ministers, to use younger or more obscure agents:

“The Lord often works where we least expect Him; He surprises us by revealing His power through instruments of His own choice, while He passes by the men to whom we have looked as those through whom light should come. . . .

“Many will reject the very messages God sends to His people, if these leading brethren do not accept them. . . . Even if all our leading men should refuse light and truth, that door will still remain open. The Lord will raise up men who will give the people the message for this time.” (GW 126).

Again, in 1882 we were told: “It may be under a rough and uninviting exterior the pure brightness of a genuine Christian character will be revealed. . . .

“Elijah took Elisha from the plough, and threw upon him the mantle of consecration. The call to this great and solemn work was presented to men of learning and position; had these men been little

in their own eyes, and trusted fully in the Lord, He would have honored them with bearing His standard in triumph to the victory. . . .

“God will work a work in our day that but few anticipate. He will raise up and exalt among us those who are taught rather by the unction of His Spirit, than by the outward training of scientific institutions.” (5T 81, 82).

Those 1882 testimonies exhibit an inspired foresight. It was as though that little lady wrote the 1888 history in advance!

In that very year, 1882, E. J. Waggoner began a course of training that was evidently under the special guidance of the Holy Spirit. He was being prepared to be the agent of a special work. He later described his experience:

“I began my real study of the Bible, thirty-four years ago [1882]. At that time Christ was set forth before my eyes “evidently crucified” for me. I was sitting a little apart from the body of the congregation in the large tent at a camp meeting in Healdsburg [California], one gloomy Sabbath afternoon. I have no idea what was the subject of the discourse. Not a word nor a text have I ever known. All that has remained with me was what I saw. Suddenly a light shone round me, and the tent was for me far more brilliantly lighted than if the noon-day sun had been shining, and I saw Christ hanging on the cross, crucified for me. In that moment I had my first positive knowledge, which came like an overwhelming flood, that God loved me, and that Christ died for me. God and I were the only beings I was conscious of in the universe. I knew then, by actual sight, that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself; I was the whole world with all its sin. I am sure that Paul's experience on the way to Damascus was no more real than mine. . . .

“I resolved at once that I would study the Bible in the light of that revelation, in order that I might help others to see the same truth. I have always believed that every part of the Bible must set forth, with more or less vividness, that glorious revelation [Christ crucified] (Letter, May 16, 1916, written just before his sudden death).

In those same years preceding 1888 the Lord was preparing his colleague. The message of truth found A. T. Jones as a private in the U. S. Army. Although not a product of the schools, he studied night and day, amassing a great store of historical and Biblical knowledge. J. S. Washburn, who knew him personally, told us that he was a humble, earnest, and deep-feeling person whose effectual prayers gave evidence that he knew the Lord (interview, June 4, 1950).

Young Jones' keen intellect was balanced by warm, simple, child-like faith. In the days when he was used of God, he was powerful in preaching and in personal ministry. In the years immediately following 1888, there were significant demonstrations of the Spirit of God working through him, including special ministry in Washington at the U. S. Senate to defeat the Blair Sunday bill. In fact, this near-century of continuing religious liberty that Americans enjoy is a legacy of the effective efforts of the unrecognized and unhonored Jones and Waggoner in opposing religious intolerance of their day.

The Spirit of God was truly preparing these two young men to herald to the remnant church and to the world itself the "beginning" of the long-awaited loud cry:

"The Lord in His great mercy sent a most precious message to His people through Elders Jones and Waggoner. This message was to bring more prominently before the world the uplifted Saviour, the sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. . . . God gave His messengers just what the people needed (1895; TM 91, 95).

For eight years following 1888, Ellen White often spoke of these two young men as "the Lord's messengers," endorsing them in words never uttered of any others. There are between 200 and 300 such enthusiastic statements from her. In 1890 she said:

"Suppose that you blot out the testimony that has been going during these last two years, proclaiming the righteousness of Christ, who can you point to as bringing out special light for the people?" (RH, March 18, 1890).

In 1888 she had said: "God is presenting to the minds of men divinely appointed precious gems of truth, appropriate for our time." (MS. 8a, 1888; A. V. Olson, *Through Crisis to Victory*, p. 279; hereafter, Olson).

"The message given us by A. T. Jones and E. J. Waggoner is the message of God to the Laodicean church" (Letter S24, 1892).

When she first heard the message of Waggoner, she immediately perceived its true significance. It was a special revelation for the church and for the world:

"I have had the question asked, what do you think of this light which these men are presenting? Why, I have been presenting it to you for the last forty-five years,—the matchless charms of Christ. This is what I have been trying to present before your minds. When Brother Waggoner brought out these ideas at Minneapolis, it was the first clear teaching on this subject from any human lips I had heard,

excepting the conversations between myself and my husband. I have said to myself, it is because God has presented it to me in vision that I see it so clearly, and they cannot see it because they have not had it presented to them as I have, and when another presented it, every fiber of my heart said amen.” (Ms. 5, 1889).

In our modern terminology, she perceived the message to be a transmission that would apply power from the engine to the drive wheels. For “forty-five years” she had been racing the engine, but the power to finish the gospel commission wasn’t getting through. Now she perceived how the new message supplementing the old would actually prepare the people of that generation for the coming of the Lord. No wonder she was happy!

How the Loud Cry Was Not Recognized

As early as April 1, 1890, Ellen White, growing in understanding, applied the language of Revelation 18 to the 1888 message:

“Several have written to me inquiring if the [1888] message of justification by faith is the third angel’s message, and I have answered, ‘It is the third angel’s message in verity.’ The prophet declares, ‘And after these things I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with his glory.’” [Rev. 18:1] (RH, April 1, 1890).

By 1892, she was ready to state unequivocally that the message was indeed the beginning of the long-awaited loud cry:

“The loud cry of the third angel has already begun in the revelation of the righteousness of Christ, the sin-pardoning Redeemer. This is the beginning of the light of the angel whose glory shall fill the whole earth.” (RH, November 22, 1892).

Note that the “beginning” of this angel’s work was the message, not its assumed acceptance by the leadership or the people.

Elder Butler, the most responsible officer of the church, was foremost in opposing that precious light of the loud cry. Few others were spiritually able to transcend his negative influence. In his blind opposition to the loud cry we may see the tragic fulfillment of the inspired warning sent him on October 1, 1885 (cf. TM 300):

“There are some who have a desire to have a decision made at once as to what is the correct view in the point under discussion. As this would please Elder Butler, it is advised that this question should be settled at once. But are minds prepared for such a decision? I could not sanction this course. . . . They are not prepared to make safe decisions. . . .

“I see no reason for the wrought-up state of feeling that has been created at this meeting [Minneapolis, 1888]. . . . The messages coming from your president at Battle Creek are calculated to stir you up to take a decided position; but I warn you against doing this. . . . Excited feelings will lead to rash moves.” (Ms. 15, 1888; Olson, p. 295).

“I can never forget the experience which we had in Minneapolis, or the things which were then revealed to me in regard to the spirit that controlled men, the words spoken, the actions done in obedience to the powers of evil. . . . They were moved at the meeting by another spirit, and they knew not that God had sent these young men to bear a special message to them which they treated with ridicule and contempt, not realizing that the heavenly intelligences were looking upon them I know that at that time the Spirit of God was insulted.” (MS. 24, 1892).

Thus did the leadership of this church, fondly expecting to be vindicated before the world in the long-expected loud cry, actually do despite to the Spirit of grace and despise the riches of His goodness.

Let us make clear that this sin of insulting the Holy Spirit did not bind the corporate body of the church in the unpardonable sin. The ancient Jews’ sin against the Holy Spirit consisted of attributing His work to Satan (Mark 3:22-30). We do not read that our brethren in general in the 1888 era went that far. Ellen White continued to minister to this church until her death in 1915, thus indicating her belief that forgiveness is possible, and that the solution to our problem is not denominational disintegration or abandonment, but denominational repentance and reconciliation with the Holy Spirit.