

The Holy Spirit *in the* Last Days



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Joel 2:28, 29; John 1:9; Acts 2:14-24; Acts 3:19, 20; James 5:7; Rev. 14:6-16; 18:1-5.*

Memory Text: “Thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left” (*Isaiah 30:21*).

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.”—Ellen G. White, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, Mar. 2, 1897.

What a message is in those words as we end this quarter's study, focusing now on the Holy Spirit in the last days. We'll look at what the Holy Spirit will do in order to prepare a people to spread this gospel and to stand in the final crisis.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 24.*

The Spirit in the Last Days

“And it shall come to pass afterward, 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” (*Joel 2:28, 29*).

Study the above verses, along with Acts 2:14-24. What message do you see here that’s applicable to us? In what ways, if any, have we, today, seen this prophecy fulfilled?

The words of Joel here are some of the most exciting in all Scripture. They point to a time when the Holy Spirit in a mighty way will be poured out just as it was at Pentecost. This outpouring, however, doesn’t happen in a vacuum; it’s all part of a single purpose: to bring people to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. This point becomes especially clear in Peter’s Pentecost speech, in which, after quoting those verses from Joel, he begins preaching about Jesus Christ (*Acts 2:22-24*).

Joel 2:28 says, too, that He will pour out His Spirit upon “all flesh.” This doesn’t mean all flesh will respond with the surrender and humility needed to receive the blessing of the Spirit. Through the action of the Holy Spirit the Lord is able to touch every soul with conviction. The Bible says: “The true light [Jesus] that enlightens every man was coming into the world” (*John 1:9, RSV*); unfortunately, though, not “every man” responds as God would like.

The good news is that all who do respond, all who will make that surrender, have the promise of eternal life in Christ.

What evidence do you see of the influence of the Holy Spirit upon those who aren’t Christians? What can we do, as Christians, to cooperate with the Spirit in order to help these people see Jesus in a fuller light?

Key Text: *Joel 2:28, 29*

Teachers Aims:

1. To examine the symbolism of the term “latter rain” and its significance both then and now.
2. To discuss the need for personal preparedness with regards to receiving the “latter rain.”

Lesson Outline:

I. The farmers wait for the rain but have no control over it; so we too must wait (*James 5:7, 8*).

- A. The Holy Spirit is ready to pour Himself out on us but we have to be alert to recognize Him.
- B. The “latter rain” of the Holy Spirit refreshes, revitalizes, and brings to maturity our readiness for what is to come.

II. To experience the refreshing of the Holy Spirit we must repent and surrender to Him (*Acts 3:19, 20*).

- A. We must strengthen our personal relationship with the Lord so that we can remain attentive and aware in these last days.
- B. The church as a whole will be effective only if its individual members are filled with the Holy Spirit.

Summary: The last days are now. Whether they are the final days of earth’s history or just our individual last days is irrelevant. The Holy Spirit, like Jesus, makes Himself available to all, but only those who accept Him will recognize what He is offering. If we as a church are to truly fulfill the Great Commission, then we must take individual and corporate responsibility for that commission. Take time again to consider the Day of Pentecost and all that the disciples did to prepare both individually and corporately for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

COMMENTARY

Introduction

As Jesus brings His gospel call to a final climactic appeal to this confused, fallen world, the Holy Spirit works with heightened intensity to combat the forces of darkness with a revelation of God’s character of mercy and justice, and the power of Christ’s saving grace.

I. The Spirit in the Last Days

God’s promise is sure—He “will pour out [His] Spirit on all flesh” with enlightening and soul-winning results of great magnitude (*Joel 2:28*). In Acts 2:14-24 Peter identified the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost as a fulfillment of that prophecy. At that time Christ inaugurated His newly formed church with supernatural power to embark on its mission of worldwide evangelism. As the details of Joel 2:28-32 show, this prophecy demands a second and final fulfillment that will usher in Christ’s second coming.

Pentecost and the Last Days

As we saw yesterday, Joel speaks of an abundant outpouring of God’s Spirit upon His people, of young men seeing visions, old men dreaming dreams, and sons and daughters prophesying (*Joel 2:28, 29*). He even sets the time frame for this experience. There will be cosmic phenomena with the sun being darkened and the moon turned into blood. Disasters on earth are described cryptically as “blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke” (*vs. 30*). All this is to precede immediately “the great and the terrible day of the Lord” (*vs. 31*).

Peter, along with other early Christian believers, viewed Christ’s first coming as the last days (*1 Cor. 10:11, Heb. 1:2, 9:26, 1 Pet. 1:20*) and applied Joel’s prophecy to the Pentecost experience (*Acts 2:16-21*), linking the gift of prophecy to the gift of tongues.

Read Joel 2:23, which precedes his words about the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. What imagery does he use?

Joel’s prophecy of the coming prophetic gift is set in the context of the early and latter rains (*Joel 2:23-32*). The refreshing, life-giving fall rains, which enabled the seed to sprout and take root, are called the early rain. The spring rain, which brought the grain to maturity and readiness for harvest, is called the latter rain. This phenomenon in the Palestinian agricultural cycle is a symbol of the spiritual refreshing God gives to His people through His Spirit (*Hos. 6:3*). Peter, fully believing he was living in the last days, experienced the early rain. The latter rain is yet to come upon God’s people at the end of time.

What are we to understand by the meaning of the “latter rain”?

“Near the close of earth’s harvest, a special bestowal of spiritual grace is promised to prepare the church for the coming of the Son of man. This outpouring of the Spirit is likened to the falling of the latter rain.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 55.

What is your own experience with the “early rain”? Why is it so important to receive the early rain in order to be prepared to receive the “latter rain”? What does it mean “to receive” either rain? What changes do we need to make in our own lives now in order to be ready for the latter rain?

II. Pentecost and the Latter Rain

At Pentecost Peter indicted the religious leaders for their despicable treatment of Christ. He also exalted the saving merits of Christ and His sacrifice. Peter made a pointed appeal for the people to repent and be baptized for the remission of sins and to receive the endowment of the Spirit as the controlling, sanctifying power of their lives.

Multitudes responded wholeheartedly and joined this faithful movement of God, braving persecution and ostracism. Read Acts 2–5. This harvest, resulting from the former rain, indicates the tenor and results of the work accomplished under the latter rain.

“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. Unless we are daily advancing in the exemplification of the active Christian virtues, we shall not recognize the manifestations of the Holy Spirit in the latter rain. It may be falling on hearts all around us, but we shall not discern or receive it.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies For Ministers and Gospel Workers*, p. 507. Read the whole chapter “Pray for the Latter Rain,” pp. 506–512. Also read *Last Day Events*, pp. 195, 196 by Ellen G. White.

III. The Latter Rain

God bids us to pray for the latter rain, not merely to wait for it in passive expectation. He promises to answer that prayer with an abundant outpouring of His Spirit that magnifies the efficacious power of Calvary. Compare Zechariah 10:1 with 12:10 and 13:1.

Prayer for the latter rain is not a quest for a spiritually thrilling experience, but for a deeper infilling of Christ and His righteousness. (*See Hos. 6:1-3, 10:12.*) It is highly instructive to look up references to rain in the Bible. *See, for example, Deut. 11:11-17; 32:1, 2; Ps. 68:9, 10; Prov. 16:15; Isa. 55:10, 11; Jer. 3:3; 14:4, 22; James 5:7, 8.*

IV. The Refreshing

“Nothing but the life-giving influences of the gospel can help the soul. Pray that the mighty energies of the Holy Spirit, with all their quickening, recuperative, and transforming power, may fall like an electric shock on the palsy-stricken soul, causing every nerve to thrill with new life, restoring the whole man from his dead, earthly, sensual state to spiritual soundness. You will thus become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world

The Latter Rain

“Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain” (*James 5:7*).

In the context of what we’ve read so far, how do you understand the words of James above? How does this text show us our utter dependence upon a source outside of ourselves for spiritual power?

As we saw yesterday, Joel uttered his prophecy in the context of “rain.” The terms *rain*, *early rain*, and *latter rain* were borrowed by the Hebrew writers in the context of their agricultural seasons. The former, or early, rain fell in the seventh month, usually just after the Feast of Tabernacles. This corresponds to our autumn, or to September–October. For the Israelites, it was the season for the plowing of the fields and the sowing of barley and wheat. The latter rain fell shortly before the grain harvest in March and early April. This rain enabled the grain to fill out and ripen for harvest.

These terms are used by the Bible writers to symbolize great periods of spiritual refreshing in connection with the preaching of the gospel. The important point is that for the harvest to be reaped, there was the need of both rains.

Look up these few verses: How do they help us understand the significance of the rain imagery, especially in the context of our mission as a church? *Matt. 9:37, 13:30, Rev. 14:15*.

As mentioned earlier, the purpose of the spiritual “latter rain” is much like the natural one: It’s to prepare the harvest for reaping. What a powerful image regarding the work the Holy Spirit is to do among His people, for they are the ones God has used to preach the gospel message to the world. “While we cherish the blessing of the early rain, we must not, on the other hand, lose sight of the fact that without the latter rain, to fill out the ears and ripen the grain, the harvest will not be ready for the sickle, and the labor of the sower will have been in vain. Divine grace is needed at the beginning, divine grace at every step of advance, and divine grace alone can complete the work.”—Ellen G. White, *The Faith I Live By*, p. 334.

through lust; and in your souls will be reflected the image of Him by whose stripes you are healed.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 267.

V. The Loud Cry

The loud cry is not a furious harangue or a frantic shriek. It is God’s final warning given in pointed terms and infinite love that lightens the earth with His glory. It is the ministry of Reconciliation’s last effort to extricate people from Satan’s snares of deadly delusions that masquerade as truth through spirits of demons working miracles and propounding unholy doctrines. God’s promise cannot be thwarted. “The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea” (*Hab. 2:14*). See also Numbers 14:21 and Psalm 119:64.

Inductive Bible Study

Texts for Discovery: *Joel 2:28-32, Matthew 24:14, James 5:7, Revelation 22:17*

- 1 Most aspects of the Christian faith have some application not only to Jesus’ life, ministry, death, and resurrection, but also to His second coming. How would you describe the Holy Spirit’s specific role in the last days?
- 2 Will people living in the last days have special access to the ministry of the Holy Spirit, at least for a time? If so, does this mean that people who lived and died before the last days had less opportunity to come to Christ? If this is true, will they be judged differently?
- 3 The early Christians believed the end was at hand partially because of the abundant evidence of the Holy Spirit’s activity in their time. How can we distinguish the outpouring of the Spirit that took place at that time from the outpouring that will occur shortly before the end really comes?
- 4 The periods of the Holy Spirit’s activity in salvation’s history often are referred to as the early rain or the apostolic period and the latter rain or the end time. How can we apply this pattern to the spiritual life of a believer?
- 5 What is the relationship of the latter rain’s appearance to other events in prophecy? Why is the latter rain necessary for most of the other prophetic events to occur? Do you think the church today is prepared to receive the latter rain? If not, what do you think needs to change? How will God help the church to change?

The Refreshing

“Repent therefore, and turn again [be converted, KJV], that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus” (Acts 3:19, 20, RSV).

Look at this incredible statement by Peter. Notice how closely he links repentance and conversion with the “times of refreshing.” In other words, what happens here in our hearts is linked with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. We must never forget the reality of this close tie between heaven and earth.

What three great last-day events is Peter referring to in the text above? What does he say that shows these are, indeed, last-day events?

Peter’s statement contains a most definite temporal element. Under inspiration, Peter is referring to great events of earth’s last days—the mighty outpouring of God’s Spirit and the final blotting out of the sins of the righteous—which are tied to a third climactic event, the second advent of Christ.

Read Revelation 14:6-16. Why do we know that these are events that immediately precede the Second Coming? How do we see in these verses evidences of a powerful outpouring of the Holy Spirit?

All through these texts we see evidence of the Holy Spirit working through His people, not only to prepare them to preach the “everlasting gospel” (vs. 6) to the world, not only to warn others against worshipping “the beast” (vs. 9), but also to prepare them to stand as those who “keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus” (vs. 12). If this isn’t the work of the Holy Spirit among us, nothing is.

As you look at the church today, why is it so evident that we will need a powerful outpouring of the Holy Spirit in order for it to do its work? Why is it so evident that you need it, as well?

“Hundreds and thousands were seen visiting families and opening before them the word of God. Hearts were convicted by the power of the Holy Spirit, and a spirit of genuine conversion was manifest. On every side doors were thrown open to the proclamation of the truth. The world seemed to be lightened with the heavenly influence.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies*, vol. 9, p. 126. See also *The Great Controversy*, pp. 464, 611, 612 by Ellen G. White.

“Many . . . will be seen hurrying hither and thither, constrained

Witnessing

Seventh-day Adventists believe that “the almost complete fulfillment of most lines of prophecy, together with the present condition of the world, indicates that Christ’s coming is imminent. The time of that event has not been revealed, and we are therefore exhorted to be ready at all times.”—Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists, #24 (© 2004, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists). Retrieved October 11, 2004, from <<http://www.adventist.org/beliefs/fundamental/>>. In other words, we don’t have a lot of time to waste in getting our lives in order for Christ’s soon return to earth. Our family members, friends, coworkers, neighbors, strangers, and others don’t have a lot of time either to prepare for Christ’s second coming.

Since the hour of His return is not known, we can’t count on having sufficient time before the end of time in order to decide at that point to follow Jesus. Knowing what we do about His soon coming, we cannot stand idly by while others say that they plan to enjoy the pleasures of this world first and then repent later while there’s still time.

Apathy has no place in our lives. A sense of urgency needs to be pushing us each day so that we do not become so comfortable with the way things are going for us that Satan regains a hold in our lives. The devil would like nothing better than for all of Christ’s followers to lose sight of what lies ahead as the end of time approaches. However, we are told in Scripture that as the end time approaches, the Holy Spirit will intensify His efforts to lead God’s children home. Daily communion with God through prayer and study of the Scriptures will keep our connection to Heaven open and free of static. Assisting those with whom we come in daily contact to expand their own lines of communication with the Father should be a primary goal of Christ’s believers.

Plan a course of action that will provide you with the opportunities to share His good news in some way with at least one stranger each day. If you’re rebuffed, don’t be discouraged. The seeds of the gospel that the Lord has led you to drop in stony hearts may one day take root and flourish.

The Loud Cry

Though we saw at Pentecost a powerful outpouring of the Holy Spirit, we believe that in the last days we will see something even more powerful. The whole world needs to know the truth about the Lord Jesus in the context of the three angels of Revelation 14, as opposed to the false doctrines of Babylon that lead to the mark of the beast. And, quite simply, who else, at this point, but Seventh-day Adventists are preaching this distinctive message? And yet, what Adventist, looking at the task ahead, believes we can do it without a supernatural outpouring of the Holy Spirit?

Thus, we believe that in the very end the Holy Spirit will bring His gifts to the church in a remarkable way. He will have to; otherwise, final events, as portrayed in prophecy, will never happen.

Read Revelation 18:1-5. What evidence do we find in these verses that shows what the results of this outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the church will be?

This “loud cry” extends everywhere, as the Lord uses His church to call out all His people from Babylon, the false religious and political systems of the world united in some final last-day persecuting power. This cry contains the ultimate plea to escape the last plagues (*Revelation 15*) and find shelter under the arms of Jesus, the Savior. In this, the final battle between the followers of the Lamb and the followers of the beast, Christ will be exalted through the renewed Pentecostal power that’s to be poured out on the earth (*Rev. 18:1*) through the Holy Spirit. At this time, we will see the harvest reaped through the latter rain.

Thus, in the very last days, the consummation of the Cross and the work of the Cross will reach fruition. All the dead in Christ will rise (*1 Thess. 4:16*), and together with those who are alive, we all will be taken off this sinful planet, once and for all (*vs. 17*). Thus, at the end, we’ll see the climactic manifestation of the Holy Spirit as He works on the hearts, not only of those who are called to proclaim this message but on those who receive it and who stand with us—not only in the last days against the forces of Babylon—but on the sea of glass in heaven, as well (*Rev. 15:1-5*).

What a gift we’ve been given in the Holy Spirit!

Write out a prayer thanking the Lord for the Holy Spirit and asking for the preparation in your own heart that will be needed in order for you to stay faithful, not only during the final crisis but even now.

by the Spirit of God to bring the light to others. The truth, the Word of God, is as a fire in their bones, filling them with a burning desire to enlighten those who sit in darkness. Many, even among the uneducated, now proclaim the words of the Lord. Children are impelled by the Spirit to go forth and declare the message from heaven. The Spirit is poured out upon all who will yield to its promptings, and, casting off all man's machinery, his binding rules and cautious methods, they will declare the truth with the might of the Spirit's power. Multitudes will receive the faith and join the armies of the Lord."—Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, p. 700.

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: What are you anticipating? A visit from grandchildren, a birthday celebration, a special anniversary getaway? How long do you have to wait? God has promised the outpouring of His Spirit. Do we have to wait? We have heard stories of His working in mighty ways in the mission field. How have you seen the Holy Spirit working through the ministry of your church?

Thought Questions:

① At the dedication of the temple, King Solomon prays a prayer that contains a prophecy: “When they sin against You” (1 Kings 8:46), and then presents his plea, “then hear . . . and forgive” (1 Kings 8:49, 50). How does your personal battle with the sin disease affect your witness? How does repentance and God’s cleansing empower your testimony? Who needs to hear of the victories God has made possible through His Spirit?

② What sparks your interest and compels you to action? Read Revelation 14:6-16 out loud in your class. Ask each person to describe his or her feelings upon hearing this passage read. Our divine appointment and responsibility are to share this message. How did our ancestors in faith respond to it? In what tangible ways are we continuing their legacy?

Application Question:

Read Joel 2:28, 29, then compare it with what was happening in Acts 2:1-24. How does Peter’s understanding of Joel’s prophecy and its fulfillment help you understand the work of the Holy Spirit? Why is it so important to recognize that the Holy Spirit can and does perform the same type of miracles in our day? As a class, petition God to prepare your hearts and guide you to become more intentionally active in service to your church and to your community. Plan an outreach event for next Sabbath afternoon.

Further Study: Ellen G. White, *Education*, pp. 35–38; *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 238–243; *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 578, 593–595; *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, pp. 21–23; *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, pp. 64–68, 506–509.

“We must not wait for the latter rain. It is coming upon all who will recognize and appropriate the dew and showers of grace that fall upon us. When we gather up the fragments of light, when we appreciate the sure mercies of God, who loves to have us trust Him, then every promise will be fulfilled.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 984.

“The convocations of the church, as in camp meetings, the assemblies of the home church, and all occasions where there is personal labor for souls, are God’s appointed opportunities for giving the early and the latter rain.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, p. 508.

Discussion Questions:

- ① As a class, talk about world affairs and trends as they relate to our understanding of last-day events. Though we mustn’t be sensational, what evidence do we see that points to the final crisis? As a class, what things can you do to help your local church understand the times we are living in and the need to prepare to receive the latter rain?
- ② As a class, think about the work of the Holy Spirit and ask this question: Of all the gifts of the Holy Spirit and of all the work He does for the church, what’s the one thing you believe your local church needs the most? Discuss.
- ③ What did you learn from this quarter’s study that has impacted your life the most? What have you learned that impresses upon you the need for personal change? If the study didn’t touch on some things you wished were touched on, why not pursue studies in that area on your own?