

THE RETURN OF THE LATTER RAIN MOVEMENT

BOOKLET TWO

THE BIBLICAL MEANING OF THE LATTER RAIN

*Understanding God's Promises
Without Adding New Doctrines*

DEUTERONOMY 11:13-14 • JOEL 2:23-29 • HOSEA 6:3
JAMES 5:7-8 • ACTS 2:16-18



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The Biblical Meaning of the Latter Rain

Understanding God's Promises Without Adding New Doctrines

Deuteronomy 11:13–14 — Joel 2:23–29 — Hosea 6:3 — James 5:7–8 — Acts 2:16–18

The promise of God's Spirit does not require a new apostolic foundation. Genuine revival brings the church into greater obedience to the Word of God, not beyond it.

INTRODUCTION

Understanding the Promise Before Examining the Movement

Before examining the doctrines of the New Order of the Latter Rain, which emerged in 1948, we must first understand what the Bible actually teaches about the former and latter rain.

This is essential because the expression *latter rain* did not originate with the movement in North Battleford, Saskatchewan.

It is a biblical expression found in both the Old and New Testaments.

For generations, Pentecostal believers have used the language of the latter rain to describe the outpouring of the Holy Ghost, the restoration of spiritual life, and the expectation of revival before the return of Jesus Christ.

The desire for such revival is not wrong.

We believe that God still pours out His Spirit, fills believers with the Holy Ghost, heals the sick, and works through the spiritual gifts described in the New Testament.

However, we must distinguish between what the Scriptures actually promise and what later religious movements have attached to those promises.

The New Order of the Latter Rain developed teachings concerning restored apostles and prophets, prophetic impartation, personal prophecy, and the restoration of church government.

These doctrines were presented by some of their proponents as part of God's work of preparing the church for the last days.

But does the biblical promise of the latter rain establish such a system?

Does Scripture teach that the church must come under a newly restored apostolic government before Jesus Christ returns?

Does the latter rain represent a new level of spiritual authority that was unavailable to the original church?

Or have certain biblical passages been interpreted beyond their original meaning?

To answer these questions, we must begin where every sound Bible study should begin: with the Word of God itself.

1. THE FORMER AND LATTER RAIN IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The expressions *former rain* and *latter rain* originally referred to the agricultural seasons of ancient Israel.

Israel's agricultural life depended heavily upon seasonal rainfall.

The former rain generally arrived in the autumn, softening the ground and preparing it for planting.

The latter rain came in the spring, helping the crops mature before harvest.

Both were necessary.

Without the former rain, the seed could not develop properly.

Without the latter rain, the harvest could suffer.

God used these natural processes to teach Israel about His provision, faithfulness, and the importance of obedience.

Deuteronomy 11:13–14 (KJV)

And it shall come to pass, if ye shall hearken diligently unto my commandments which I command you this day, to love the LORD your God, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul,

That I will give you the rain of your land in his due season, the first rain and the latter rain, that thou mayest gather in thy corn, and thy wine, and thine oil.

Notice the original context.

God was speaking to Israel concerning the land He had promised them.

The rain was connected to the agricultural prosperity of the nation under the covenant established through Moses.

The promise was not originally a prophecy about the establishment of a new apostolic government thousands of years later.

It concerned God's provision for His covenant people.

This does not mean that the imagery cannot carry spiritual significance elsewhere in Scripture.

However, we must first recognize what the passage actually says before attempting to apply it symbolically.

A spiritual application must never be allowed to replace the original meaning of Scripture.

2. JOEL'S PROPHECY AND THE RESTORATION OF ISRAEL

The prophet Joel provides one of the most important passages associated with the latter rain.

Joel describes a devastating crisis involving locusts, agricultural destruction, and national distress.

The land had suffered.

The harvest had been destroyed.

The people were called to repentance.

Joel 2:12–13 (KJV)

Therefore also now, saith the LORD, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning:

And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil.

The emphasis was not upon obtaining new spiritual offices or governmental authority.

It was upon repentance and returning to the Lord.

Following this call to repentance, Joel describes God's promise of restoration.

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.

The following verses speak about restored agricultural abundance.

Joel 2:24 (KJV)

And the floors shall be full of wheat, and the fats shall overflow with wine and oil.

The context is unmistakably connected to the restoration of the land following devastation.

The Lord promises to restore what had been lost.

The rain represents God's faithfulness in providing what the land requires.

But Joel's prophecy does not end with agricultural restoration.

It moves from the restoration of the land to the promise of an extraordinary outpouring of God's Spirit.

This transition is essential to understanding the passage.

3. THE PROMISE OF THE SPIRIT IN JOEL 2:28–29

After describing the restoration of the land, Joel declares:

Joel 2:28–29 (KJV)

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.

This is a remarkable prophecy.

God promised an outpouring of His Spirit that would extend beyond the limited patterns of spiritual empowerment commonly seen under the Old Testament.

The promise included sons and daughters, young and old, servants and handmaids.

The emphasis was upon the widespread availability of God's Spirit.

It was not a declaration that a future generation would become spiritually superior to the original apostles.

Neither did Joel describe a new class of governing apostles who would eventually rule over the church.

He declared that God would pour out His Spirit.

This is the promise that Peter identified on the Day of Pentecost.

The distinction is crucial.

The promised outpouring concerns the work of God's Spirit among His people. It does not establish a new hierarchy of spiritual rulers.

4. PETER'S EXPLANATION ON THE DAY OF PENTECOST

On the Day of Pentecost, the disciples were gathered in Jerusalem when the Holy Ghost was poured out.

Acts 2:4 (KJV)

And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

The event attracted the attention of the multitude.

Some were amazed, while others mocked.

Peter stood with the eleven and explained what was taking place.

Acts 2:16–18 (KJV)

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:

Peter did not describe Pentecost as a preliminary experience that would eventually be replaced by a superior spiritual order.

He declared that the outpouring was what Joel had prophesied.

The phrase "this is that" is particularly significant.

Peter identified the experience taking place in Jerusalem with the prophetic promise of God's Spirit.

He did not tell the people that they must wait nearly two thousand years for the true fulfillment of Joel's prophecy.

The promised Spirit was being poured out before their eyes.

This does not mean that every detail of Joel's prophecy was exhausted on that day.

Peter also quoted Joel's language concerning signs in heaven and the coming day of the Lord.

But the outpouring of the Spirit had unmistakably begun.

Pentecost was not merely preparation for the church to receive the Holy Ghost. It was the actual fulfillment of the promise that God would pour out His Spirit.

5. THE HOLY GHOST WAS NOT RESERVED FOR A FUTURE GENERATION

One of the difficulties with certain restorationist interpretations is the suggestion that the church must eventually recover a level of spiritual power or authority that was unavailable to the original believers.

The New Testament presents a different picture.

The original church received the Holy Ghost, preached the gospel, witnessed miracles, exercised spiritual gifts, and carried the message of salvation throughout the known world.

Peter did not preach a partial gospel.

Paul did not establish an incomplete church.

The apostles did not lay a temporary foundation that future generations would need to replace.

Consider Peter's declaration:

Acts 2:38–39 (KJV)

Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.

The promise was not limited to those present on the Day of Pentecost.

It extended to their children and to those afar off.

The promise remains connected to God's calling, not to membership in a special end-time apostolic movement.

The same Holy Ghost who filled believers in Acts remains available today.

We do not need a different Spirit.

We do not need a new gospel.

We do not need a new apostolic foundation.

We need to receive and obey what God has already provided.

6. WHAT DOES JAMES MEAN BY THE LATTER RAIN?

Another important passage is found in the epistle of James.

James 5:7–8 (KJV)

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.

Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.

This passage is frequently used to support the idea of a great end-time outpouring of spiritual power.

However, we must examine what James was actually teaching.

James was encouraging believers to remain patient in the midst of hardship and oppression.

He compared their situation to that of a farmer waiting for his harvest.

The farmer cannot force the rain to fall.

He cannot produce a harvest merely by declaring that the season has arrived.

He must patiently wait for the natural processes that God has established.

James uses this familiar agricultural picture to encourage believers to remain steadfast until the coming of the Lord.

The primary subject is patience.

The illustration is agricultural.

The goal is endurance.

James does not explicitly teach that a new generation of apostles and prophets will arise before Christ returns.

He does not describe a restored church government.

He does not identify the latter rain as a new level of prophetic authority.

Those ideas must be brought into the passage from somewhere else.

This does not prevent Christians from using the agricultural image to illustrate their hope for spiritual fruitfulness.

But an illustration should not be transformed into a doctrine that the passage itself does not teach.

James uses the latter rain to teach patience while awaiting the Lord, not to establish a new system of spiritual government.

7. THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A BIBLICAL PROMISE AND A PROPHETIC INTERPRETATION

There is an important distinction between what Scripture promises and what a religious movement claims Scripture means.

The Bible promises the outpouring of the Holy Ghost.

The Bible teaches that spiritual gifts operate within the body of Christ.

The Bible teaches that believers should desire spiritual gifts and that the church should be spiritually mature.

But these truths do not automatically establish every interpretation that has been attached to them.

For example, a teacher might argue that the former rain represents Pentecost and the latter rain represents a greater end-time outpouring.

That interpretation has appeared in various Christian traditions, including early Pentecostalism.

It is possible to use the imagery devotionally to express hope for continued revival.

However, the interpretation should not be presented as though Scripture explicitly establishes two separate dispensations of the Holy Ghost.

Joel's original reference to rain concerns agricultural restoration.

Peter identifies Joel's promise of the Spirit with Pentecost.

James uses the former and latter rain as an illustration of patience.

None of these passages explicitly establishes the doctrinal system developed by the New Order of the Latter Rain.

The problem is not the desire for revival.

The problem arises when an interpretation becomes the foundation for teachings that cannot be established from Scripture itself.

8. THE DANGER OF BUILDING DOCTRINE UPON SYMBOLISM

The Bible contains many symbols, types, figures, and prophetic images.

These are valuable when interpreted carefully.

However, symbolism can become dangerous when the interpreter gives a biblical image meanings that the text itself does not establish.

Consider the following progression.

First, the former rain is identified with the Day of Pentecost.

Second, the latter rain is interpreted as a future spiritual outpouring greater than Pentecost.

Third, this future outpouring is said to require restored apostles and prophets.

Fourth, these restored ministries are presented as necessary governing authorities for the church.

Finally, submission to these authorities may be portrayed as essential to participating in God's end-time work.

Notice what has happened.

An agricultural image has become the basis for an entire system of church government.

Yet the original passages do not establish that progression.

Each additional claim requires its own biblical support.

A doctrine cannot be considered biblical merely because it begins with a biblical phrase.

The same principle applies to prophetic interpretations, spiritual warfare teachings, and claims of supernatural revelation.

We must ask whether the conclusions are actually taught by Scripture or merely associated with scriptural terminology.

Biblical language does not automatically make a teaching biblical.

9. DOES THE BIBLE PROMISE REVIVAL IN THE LAST DAYS?

This question deserves careful consideration.

The New Testament clearly teaches that God continues to call people to salvation and pour out His Spirit.

Acts 2:39 extends the promise of the Holy Ghost to those whom the Lord calls.

The gospel is to be preached throughout the world.

Believers are commanded to remain filled with the Spirit, faithful in prayer, and obedient to the Word of God.

There is no biblical reason to believe that God has lost His ability to save, heal, deliver, or fill people with the Holy Ghost.

We should pray for revival.

We should expect God to work.

We should preach the gospel with faith.

But we must distinguish these biblical expectations from claims that Scripture guarantees a particular modern revival movement, a specific number of conversions, or the rise of an extraordinary end-time governing ministry.

The Bible also warns of deception, false prophets, apostasy, and persecution.

Matthew 24:24 (KJV)

For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.

Jesus did not teach that extraordinary spiritual manifestations would automatically prove divine approval.

He warned that impressive signs could accompany deception.

Therefore, believers must maintain both faith and discernment.

We should expect God to fulfill His promises without assuming that every movement claiming an end-time anointing represents their fulfillment.

10. THE CHURCH DOES NOT NEED A GREATER FOUNDATION

The New Testament describes Jesus Christ as the foundation upon which the church is built.

1 Corinthians 3:11 (KJV)

For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

Paul also describes the church as being built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Jesus Christ Himself as the chief cornerstone.

These passages emphasize the established foundation of the church.

The church may grow.

Its understanding may deepen.

Its members must mature.

Its ministries must function faithfully.

But growth does not require the replacement of its foundation.

There is no indication that a future generation must establish a new apostolic order to complete what the original apostles began.

The responsibility of every generation is to remain faithful to the gospel that has already been delivered.

Galatians 1:8 (KJV)

But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.

Paul's warning is particularly significant because it includes supernatural claims.

Even an angelic messenger would not possess authority to introduce another gospel.

How much more should we examine the claims of contemporary prophets, apostles, and religious movements?

The issue is not whether a person claims to have received a revelation.

The issue is whether that revelation agrees with the gospel already delivered.

11. THE TRUE PURPOSE OF SPIRITUAL OUTPOURING

The outpouring of the Holy Ghost was never intended to establish a spiritually superior class of believers who exercise authority over everyone else.

Jesus explained the purpose of receiving spiritual power.

Acts 1:8 (KJV)

But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

The power of the Holy Ghost equips believers to become witnesses of Jesus Christ.

The Spirit leads us into truth.

The Spirit produces holiness.

The Spirit empowers prayer, worship, evangelism, and ministry.

The Spirit distributes gifts for the edification of the body of Christ.

The purpose is not to elevate human personalities.

It is to glorify Jesus Christ.

John 16:13–14 (KJV)

Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come.

He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you.

The genuine operation of the Holy Ghost directs attention toward Jesus Christ.

A movement that increasingly centers its identity upon special apostles, prophetic personalities, or exclusive spiritual authority must be examined carefully.

Spiritual power was given to glorify Christ and advance His gospel, not to establish a new spiritual aristocracy.

12. WHAT SHOULD WE EXPECT FROM GENUINE REVIVAL?

Genuine revival should produce results consistent with the teaching of Scripture.

We should expect repentance.

We should expect renewed obedience to God's Word.

We should expect people to receive the Holy Ghost.

We should expect spiritual gifts to operate according to biblical order.

We should expect greater holiness, humility, love, and commitment to the gospel.

We should also expect believers to grow in spiritual discernment.

A genuine work of God does not require believers to suspend biblical judgment.

It does not demand unquestioning loyalty to spiritual personalities.

It does not place private revelations above Scripture.

It does not redefine the gospel.

The early church provides our pattern.

Acts 2:42 (KJV)

And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.

The same people who received the Holy Ghost continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine.

They did not separate spiritual experience from doctrinal faithfulness.

Neither should we.

The evidence of genuine revival is not merely that something extraordinary happens, but that people are brought into a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ and greater obedience to His Word.

CONCLUSION

The Promise Is Still Ours, but the Foundation Has Not Changed

The biblical teaching concerning the former and latter rain begins with God's faithfulness in providing for Israel's agricultural needs.

Joel uses this imagery in a prophecy that moves from the restoration of the land to the promised outpouring of God's Spirit.

Peter identifies the outpouring on the Day of Pentecost with Joel's prophecy.

James uses the former and latter rain to illustrate the patience believers must exercise while awaiting the coming of the Lord.

These passages contain important truths.

They reveal God's faithfulness.

They demonstrate His power to restore.

They establish the promise of the Holy Ghost.

They encourage believers to remain steadfast.

But they do not establish the doctrines of the New Order of the Latter Rain.

They do not require a new apostolic government.

They do not teach that a spiritually superior generation must arise to complete the church.

They do not authorize new revelations that supersede the original apostolic message.

The promise of the Holy Ghost remains available to all whom the Lord calls.

We should continue to seek genuine revival.

We should pray for souls to be saved.

We should desire the operation of spiritual gifts.

We should expect God to work among His people.

But we must never confuse the promises of Scripture with doctrines that have been added to those promises.

The church does not need a new latter-rain doctrine. It needs the genuine outpouring of the Holy Ghost while remaining steadfast in the apostles' doctrine.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, we thank You for the promises contained in Your Word and for the gift of the Holy Ghost.

We thank You that Your Spirit was poured out on the Day of Pentecost and that Your promise continues to reach those whom You call.

Give us a sincere desire for genuine revival.

Let our churches be filled with prayer, repentance, holiness, and the power of the Holy Ghost.

Help us to understand Your Word correctly and never to build doctrines upon interpretations that go beyond what You have revealed.

Protect us from spiritual pride, false authority, and the desire to follow extraordinary personalities rather than Jesus Christ.

Give pastors wisdom to teach sound doctrine, and give believers hearts that are willing to examine every spiritual claim according to Scripture.

Let the Holy Ghost operate freely among us according to Your Word and Your will.

May every spiritual gift, every ministry, and every work of revival bring glory to the name of Jesus Christ.

Keep us faithful to the foundation established by Your apostles.

In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

SCRIPTURES FOR FURTHER STUDY

The Former and Latter Rain: Deuteronomy 11:13–14; Jeremiah 5:24; Hosea 6:3; Joel 2:23; Zechariah 10:1; James 5:7–8.

The Promise of the Holy Ghost: Joel 2:28–29; Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4–8; Acts 2:1–39; Acts 10:44–48; Acts 19:1–6.

The Apostolic Foundation: Matthew 16:18; Acts 2:42; 1 Corinthians 3:11; Ephesians 2:19–22; Galatians 1:6–9; Jude 3.

Biblical Discernment: Matthew 7:15–23; Matthew 24:24; 1 Corinthians 12–14; 1 Thessalonians 5:19–22; 1 John 4:1–6.