

The Promised Revival: God’s Mission Completed



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *Matt. 28:18–20; James 5:7, 8; Zech. 10:1; Matt. 3:11; Rev. 18:1; 19:11–16.*

Memory Text: “Be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand” (*James 5:7, 8, NKJV*).

The challenge of preaching the gospel in the context of the three angels’ messages to the entire world may seem impossible. Although the Seventh-day Adventist Church is growing rapidly, it is not keeping up with the population. There are multiple areas of the world where the name “Seventh-day Adventist” (much less our message) is not known.

The reality of this harsh fact leads to serious questions. Is it possible for the gospel to be preached to the entire world in this generation? Will there be some unusual breakthrough that will dramatically speed up the proclamation of the three angels’ messages? There is always one thing to keep in mind when we discuss this topic: the mission is God’s, and He will accomplish it. At the same time, however, we must remember that we have been called to a crucial role in that final work, as well.

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 28.*

The Promised Power

Christ's Great Commission in Matthew 28:18–20 is accompanied by His great promise. What is that promise, what does it mean in a practical sense, and how can we draw comfort from it? Why is that promise so important to us?

The disciples preached not in their strength but in Christ's. According to Paul, in fact, the gospel was preached to every creature under heaven in just a few short years (*Col. 1:23*). Although some might question the precise meaning of Paul's words, it is undeniable that the gospel made a powerful impact on first-century society. It changed the world. Christ promised His disciples that He would "send the Promise of My Father" and they would receive "power from on high" (*Luke 24:49, NKJV*). The Savior added, "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (*Acts 1:8, NKJV*).

No matter how challenging the task, the promises of God are sure. Jesus' statement that "this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come" (*Matt. 24:14, NKJV*) is a promise. The proclamation of the gospel to the entire world may seem impossible, but God's power will overcome every obstacle. Every person on planet Earth will have a reasonable opportunity to hear and understand God's message of love and truth before the return of our Lord (*see Rev. 18:1*).

"I saw angels hurrying to and fro in heaven, descending to the earth, and again ascending to heaven, preparing for the fulfillment of some important event. Then I saw another mighty angel commissioned to descend to the earth, to unite his voice with the third angel, and give power and force to his message. Great power and glory were imparted to the angel, and as he descended, the earth was lightened with his glory. The light which attended this angel penetrated everywhere." —Ellen G. White, *Early Writings*, p. 277.

God will finish His work. He will pour out His Spirit in mighty power and accomplish what seems impossible according to all human planning.

What are ways that you can, in your immediate sphere, be a more effective witness for the Lord? That is, what can you do to help to see the fulfillment of Matthew 24:14?

The Early and Latter Rain

Both the Old and New Testaments use the symbolism of water to represent the Holy Spirit. The prophet Isaiah quotes the words of our Lord, “ ‘I will pour water on him who is thirsty. . . . I will pour My Spirit on your descendants’ ” (Isa. 44:3, NKJV). Isaiah uses a common Hebrew literary device called parallelism. The second phrase in the passage explains the first. The prophet Joel also discusses the symbolism of water. God promises to water Israel’s fields, then declares, “ ‘And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh’ ” (Joel 2:28, NKJV). Jesus uses the symbolism of water to represent the Holy Spirit (John 7:37–39).

What are the two symbols that each of the following texts use regarding the outpouring of the Holy Spirit? Joel 2:21–24; 28–32; James 5:7, 8. **How** are we to understand what they mean?

In Bible times, sowing and plowing took place in the middle of October, shortly after the falling of the early rains. These early rains brought the seed to germination and nurtured its early growth. The latter rain came in the late spring to bring the ripening fruit to harvest. The barley harvest and other grain harvests were spring events, followed by the fruit harvest in the summer and fall.

God uses the symbolism of the early and latter rain in two ways. The early rain of the Spirit fell upon the disciples at Pentecost in order to launch the Christian mission. The latter rain will be poured out on God’s church at the end of time in order to complete His mission on earth. The term *early rain* also refers to the daily work of God’s Spirit—convicting, instructing, guiding, and empowering each believer. The *latter rain* is a term used to describe a special endowment of God’s Holy Spirit on Christ’s church just before the coming of Jesus.

“Under the figure of the early and the latter rain, that falls in Eastern lands at seedtime and harvest, the Hebrew prophets foretold the bestowal of spiritual grace in extraordinary measure upon God’s church. The outpouring of the Spirit in the days of the apostles was the beginning of the early, or former, rain, and glorious was the result. . . .

“But 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; and it is for this added power that Christians are to send their petitions to the Lord of the harvest ‘in the time of the latter rain.’ ”
—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 54, 55.

Prerequisites for the Latter Rain

What do the following texts tell us about the preparation needed in order to receive the Holy Spirit's power in its fullness? *Acts 1:14, Zech. 10:1, Acts 3:18–20, 4:31, Ps. 119:25, John 6:63.*

The Scriptures invite us to ask God for the Holy Spirit (*Luke 11:13*). The disciples believed Christ's promise, waited in unity, and prayed for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (*Acts 1:8, 14*). The reason that God asks us to pray for the Holy Spirit is not that He is unwilling to give us the Spirit but that we are not prepared to receive it. As we pray for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, God works on our hearts to lead us to deeper repentance. Praying in small groups with other church members draws us into a closer bond of unity and fellowship. Both prayer and Bible study prepare our minds to be sensitive to the ministry of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

What is the natural result of spiritual renewal in our lives? Where does all spiritual revival and reformation lead? *Ps. 51:10–13; Acts 4:13, 20; 5:33; 8:4.*

All spiritual revival and genuine reformation lead to a passionate desire to witness. When our hearts are filled with a deep appreciation for everything that Jesus has done for us, then, like Peter and John, “we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard” (*Acts 4:20, NKJV*). The outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the early rain on the Day of Pentecost empowered the disciples to effectively witness. Their witness was so powerful that a rebellious mob in Thessalonica screamed in fear that “these who have turned the world upside down have come here too” (*Acts 17:6, NKJV*).

Just as the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost enabled the disciples to be a formidable witness to their generation, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in latter-rain power will empower God's church to reach the world in the final generation. It will take nothing less than latter-rain power to complete God's mission on earth, and God offers nothing less. Heaven's most precious gift is offered in infinite supply in order to accomplish the most urgent and important task ever entrusted to His church.

The early disciples turned the world “upside down” with their preaching and witness. Why isn't that said of us?

The Baptism of Fire

Both the Old and New Testaments use a variety of symbols, such as water, wind, and oil, to describe the work of the Holy Spirit. John the Baptist links another image, that of fire, to the work of the Holy Spirit (*Matt. 3:11, Luke 3:16*).

There are many who have misunderstood John's statement. The passage does not say, " 'He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit or with fire' " (*NKJV*). It says, "He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire." The second expression, " 'and with fire,' " explains the first expression, "the baptism of the Holy Spirit." The baptism of the Holy Spirit is the baptism of fire. The word *baptism* in the New Testament is used 80 times and refers to total immersion.

Read the following passages and describe what the symbolism of fire represents in the Bible. *Exod. 3:2–4; 24:17; 1 Kings 18:24; Mal. 3:2, 3; Acts 2:1–4; Heb. 12:29.*

The symbolism of fire is a symbol of the glory, presence, and power of God manifested in the ministry of the Holy Spirit. To be baptized with fire is to be immersed in the glory of God's presence through the Holy Spirit in order to witness in His power. Moses met God at the burning bush and then left the glory of His presence in order to witness to Pharaoh. Elijah witnessed to Israel in the glory of God's fiery presence on Mount Carmel. When tongues of fire fell on Pentecost, the disciples witnessed in languages that they had never before known. The baptism of the Holy Spirit is immersion in the presence and power of God in order that we can effectively witness of His glory. Once again, in the last days of earth's history, God's people will be immersed in His presence, filled with His power, and sent out to witness of His glory to the world.

The earth will be filled with the glory of God. "The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea" (*Hab. 2:14, NKJV*). In prophetic vision, John saw an angel messenger descend from heaven and "the earth was illuminated with his glory" (*Rev. 18:1, NKJV*).

God's glory, His loving character, will be revealed through the power of the Holy Spirit to a waiting world and a watching universe. Every person on planet Earth will have the opportunity to both hear and understand God's last-day message.

God's glory, His loving character, will be revealed to the world. How can you, right now, in your own sphere, reveal that glory in your life? What will that require on your part?

The Great Controversy Ended

The entire book of Revelation can be summarized in just a few words: *Jesus wins, Satan loses.*

Read Revelation 12:17; 17:13, 14; 19:11–16. What is the central message of these passages?

Here is good news: the same Jesus who defeated Satan on the cross will come again and triumph over the powers of hell and put a full end to evil (*Rev. 19:19–21; Ezek. 28:18, 19*). Evil will not have the last word. Poverty and pestilence will not have the last word. Sickness and suffering will not have the last word. Chaos and crime will not have the last word. Disease and death will not have the last word.

Instead, God will.

Until then, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are doing everything possible to reach every person. God’s heart aches over a lost world. Soon His people will reveal to the world, in both the witness of their words and their works, Jesus’ amazing grace and truth.

Of course, Satan will do everything in His power to oppose this witness. The final crisis will break upon this world. Jesus will pour out His Spirit in latter-rain power, and the work of God on earth will be finished.

“Servants of God, with their faces lighted up and shining with holy consecration, will hasten from place to place to proclaim the message from heaven. By thousands of voices, all over the earth, the warning will be given. Miracles will be wrought, the sick will be healed, and signs and wonders will follow the believers.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 612.

The work of God on earth will be finished. Jesus will come. All heaven and earth will rejoice. There is no more important priority in our lives than experiencing a revival of God’s grace in our hearts daily and inviting His Holy Spirit to make us into His image (*1 John 3:1–3*).

Our world is falling apart. Who can’t see that? Is there anything that matters more than opening our hearts to Jesus and pleading for the revival and reformation so needed, not just by each one of us individually but by our church as a whole? What would happen if our own hearts were totally surrendered to Him and we were completely devoted to spreading this message to the world?

Further Study: “The message will be carried not so much by argument as by the deep conviction of the Spirit of God. The arguments have been presented. The seed has been sown, and now it will spring up and bear fruit. The publications distributed by missionary workers have exerted their influence, yet many whose minds were impressed have been prevented from fully comprehending the truth or from yielding obedience. Now the rays of light penetrate everywhere, the truth is seen in its clearness, and the honest children of God sever the bands which have held them. Family connections, church relations, are powerless to stay them now. Truth is more precious than all besides. Notwithstanding the agencies combined against the truth, a large number take their stand upon the Lord’s side.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 612.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ In the statement above, Ellen G. White wrote: “The message will be carried not so much by argument as by the deep conviction of the Spirit of God.” In class, discuss what you think that means. What does it not mean? After all, our message is very logical, very reasonable, and it comes with some very powerful arguments in its favor. How are we to understand, then, what she is telling us?
- ❷ What spiritual application do the promises God gave to His people in the Old Testament have for His church today? *Deut. 11:13–18, Hos. 6:1–3, 10:12.*
- ❸ Dr. Stephen Hawking, one of the world’s greatest scientists, called the concept of an afterlife a “fairy story for people afraid of the dark.” Why does a statement like that show just how crucial and hopeful our message is for a world that knows neither God nor His love?
- ❹ Though we don’t know when Jesus is going to come back, we do know that we want Him to and that we want this sin-sick world to end and a new sinless world to begin. That’s why we believe revival and reformation are so crucial to us as a people, and it’s why our leaders are calling us to it. In the end, though, it will not come by anything other than the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, and that will not happen until we, as individuals, make a conscious choice to surrender ourselves with all our hearts and souls and minds to the Lord. How can we, without judging others, without making comparisons among ourselves, do our part to encourage one another to be prepared for the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives?

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Matthew 28:18–20*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Understand that, although finishing God’s work on earth and proclaiming the gospel to the entire world might seem impossible, God will pour out His Holy Spirit in its fullness on His people in order to complete His mission.

Feel: Experience the joy of knowing that God will work miraculously to finish His work.

Do: Determine to make a full surrender of every aspect of his or her life to Jesus and open his or her heart to receive the power of the latter rain.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: God’s Power Unleashed

A What promise did Jesus give with His command to His disciples to preach the gospel to the ends of the earth?

B How are the early and latter rains different in what they accomplish? When do these symbols apply?

II. Feel: God’s People Prepared

A What are the prerequisites for receiving the latter rain? Why hasn’t the Holy Spirit been poured out in the fullness of power yet?

B What is the baptism of fire, and how can you receive it? Is the baptism of fire different from the baptism of the Holy Spirit? Explain.

III. Do: God’s Promises Fulfilled

A What role does the outpouring of the Holy Spirit play in the finishing of God’s work on earth?

B What role do God’s people play?

C How can we reveal His glory and be the instruments He uses to complete His mission?

► **Summary:** When Jesus ascended to heaven, He promised that through His Holy Spirit He would empower His earthly disciples to proclaim the gospel to the ends of the earth. These promises will reach their complete fulfillment in His last-day church as the power of the latter rain descends and His people participate with Him in the completion of His mission on earth.

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1**—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: *Acts 1:8*

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: When Jesus ascended to heaven, He promised His disciples the gift of the Holy Spirit to proclaim the gospel to the entire world. Jesus' words were fulfilled on Pentecost, and they launched the Christian church; they will be fulfilled in abundance in His last-day church through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the latter rain.

Just for Teachers: Emphasize that although the task before the church is great, God's power is greater. Make a practical application to your own community. God wants to do something special in your town where you live. God's mission for us is always where we are. He is longing to pour out His Spirit on your church in order to empower your members to share Jesus' love in your community.

Their stories are amazing. Like many of the first-century disciples, they do not appear to be the best equipped to share God's Word with others. They do not necessarily have the qualities to be effective witnesses, but they have the one quality that matters most—surrendered hearts, filled with the Holy Spirit.

José was brought up without the advantage of an education in a small South American farming community. Even as an adult he could not read or write, but his children could. He encouraged them to read the Bible to him. In this way, he memorized hundreds of Bible texts. One day the Holy Spirit deeply impressed him with the need to share His faith with others. He began visiting other families in his community with his Bible in his hand, explaining that he could not read and that he would like them to read the Bible to him. When they agreed, he directed them to specific texts on a single Bible topic, such as salvation, the second coming of Christ, or the Sabbath. As the weekly Bible readings continued, many showed an interest in the Seventh-day Adventist message and were eventually baptized.

Sonya is blind but has real spiritual eyesight. One of her friends serves as her guide through the streets of her city in Southern India. She knocks on the doors of one person after another, asking each one if they would like her to pray for them. She has developed scores of spiritual friends through her prayer ministry. Many of these people have taken Bible studies and are now baptized.

The stories of José and Sonya, who live continents apart, share an eternal truth with us. God does not call the qualified; He qualifies those He calls. He uses those who are willing, empowers them, and sends them out to witness for Him. The Great Commission in Matthew 28 is not for a select few. It is for the entire church. When we step out in faith, He will use us powerfully. When Christ has a people completely committed to Him and willing to share His love and truth, He will pour out His Holy Spirit in latter-rain power for the finishing of His work.

Discuss With the Class: What qualities does God look for in selecting effective witnesses for Him?

► STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: Encourage your class with the assurance that God desires to use each member as a powerful witness for Him. Point out that although the task of proclaiming the gospel to the entire world seems impossible, there are no impossibilities with God. Through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in latter-rain power, the work of God on earth will be finished and Jesus will come.

Bible Commentary

I. His Authority and Mission *(Review Matthew 28:18–20 with your class.)*

Jesus said, “ ‘All authority has been given to Me. . . . Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations’ ” (*NKJV*). As we pointed out in our lesson in week four, the word for “authority” also can be translated as “power” or “divine privilege.” In His life, death, and resurrection, Jesus triumphed over all the forces of evil, including all evil spirits, demonic forces, disease, and death. He is the One who is the Master of every situation.

The word *exousia* is used throughout the Gospel of Matthew to indicate Christ’s authority over the forces of evil in every situation. In Matthew 9:6 and 10:1, Jesus has the authority (*exousia*) over disease and demons. When we step out in faith to share Jesus’ message with others, we go in His authority with His power. He supplies us with wisdom, strength, and courage. He has triumphed over the forces of hell. Ellen G. White adds this divinely inspired thought: “Thus Christ gave His disciples their commission. He made full provision for the prosecution of the work, and took upon Himself the responsibility for its success. So long as they obeyed His word, and worked in connection with Him, they could not fail.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 822.

The second phrase that is significant in Matthew 28:19 is “ ‘all nations’ ” (*NKJV*). In the original it is *ta ethne*. It literally means all ethnic groups or all peoples. Christ commissions His church to proclaim the gospel of His love and truth to every person in every village, town, city, state, province, and country in the world. The task is great, but our God is greater.

Consider This: Christ gives His people the authority over all of the powers of hell and the forces of evil in order to carry out the gospel commission. In what examples from the book of Acts is God’s power manifested?

II. His Power and His Presence *(Review Matthew 3:11 with your class.)*

The baptism of fire represents immersion in the presence of God. His Holy Spirit fills the heart of each believer, cleansing and purifying the life from those sins that prevent him or her from being an effective witness. Bible scholar LeRoy Froom explains the expression “the baptism of fire” in these words: “It is an explanatory phrase, completing the idea. It is the Scriptural way of repetition to emphasize and enforce a single thought. We are to be baptized with divine fire now to save us from destruction by consuming fire later.”—*The Coming of the Comforter* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1956), p. 268. The personal presence of Christ, through the Holy Spirit, is a purifying presence. The Holy Spirit searches our inmost souls. The Holy Spirit penetrates our thoughts. The Holy Spirit cleanses our hearts and energizes our spiritual lives.

Consider This: Christ has promised that our lives can be filled with the powerful presence of the Holy Spirit. What does it mean to be immersed in the presence of God? How is that possible?

III. His Glory and Character *(Review James 5:7, 8 and Revelation 18:1 with your class.)*

Through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in latter-rain power, the earth will be illuminated with the glory of God. The greatest manifestation of the Holy Spirit’s power since Pentecost will be poured out. The light of God’s Word will penetrate the darkest corners of this earth. God’s glory is His character (*Exod. 33:18, 19*). His eternal character of love will be manifest in His people to reveal before a waiting world and a watching universe that His grace is sufficient in this sinful world to overcome all the powers of evil. In their lives and in their witness, His people will reveal His character of love. Through His power, His message will triumph, and Jesus will come (*Matt. 24:14*).

Consider This: The Bible’s last book, Revelation, says that an angel came down out of heaven, and “the earth was illuminated with his glory” (*Rev. 18:1, NKJV*). What does this mean? How is the earth filled with God’s glory?

►STEP 3—Apply

Thought Questions:

1 What hinders the outpouring of the latter rain in its fullness in your life? Why is it not worth cherishing that habit or attitude? What keeps you from surrendering it to God?

2 Given what God has promised us in the gift of the Spirit to finish His work on earth, why do you think we are so reluctant to ask for the Holy Spirit and claim His power in our lives?

►STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Lead your class in a discussion of what a church filled with the power of the Holy Spirit would look like. This exercise is designed to get your class members thinking about the reality of a church filled with latter-rain power.

Carefully think through what a church’s prayer ministry, membership involvement, children’s and Sabbath School ministries, church services, and evangelistic ministry will look like when the Holy Spirit is poured out in its fullness. Describe a church filled with Spirit-filled members.