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The Latter Rain Revival Movement

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“The Latter Rain Revival Movement?”

Part I

by Thomas Ice

One of the most significant influences within Evangelicalism the last twenty-five years has been the reemergence of “latter rain” theology. Yet, many are not even aware that such an influence exists within modern Christianity. Latter rain theology is sweeping the charismatic movement and revivalist evangelicals who believe that a global revival will take place before Christ will be allowed to return at the second advent. Popular movements such as the Vineyard Churches, Promise Keepers, and likely a majority of charismatic churches and organizations imbibe deeply from the fountain of latter rain theology. In this series of articles I want to trace the rise and development of the restoration and latter rain teachings that have been around for at least the last two hundred years. Then, I want to explain why these views are unscriptural and are having a negative impact upon the literal interpretation of Bible prophecy.

DEFINITIONS

Restoration

Restorationists simply believe that God is restoring first-century or apostolic Christianity through their particular movement or group. Restoration is also used by a smaller number of teachers to teach that there will be a restoration of all things as they were before the fall; a perfect state. Virtually all Christians have thought that their approach to Christianity is the right one, but Restorationists believe that the true form or emphasis has been lost for a long time and they are being used by God to restore the original.

The last two-hundred years have seen a number of Restorationist movements attempting to restore primitive Christianity. A number of these groups are either fringe groups or cults. Joseph Smith (1805-44), the founder of Mormonism, believed that he was restoring the faith of early Christianity. This included a restoration of apostles and prophets, revelation, and speaking in tongues. When completed this restoration would usher in the millennium. Many today are familiar with the Churches of Christ, theologically descended from Alexander Campbell (1788-1866), who believed that he was restoring the apostolic doctrine of the early church. The Irvingites in Britain (more later), Jehovah’s Witnesses, and the Armstrong Worldwide Church of God are others which have arisen with the intention of restoring true Christianity. However, as we shall see later, the largest restoration movement began in 1901 when Pentecostalism was born.

The particular type of restoration teachings I am interested in dealing with in this article are those gaining popularity within the charismatic movement today. In addition to arguing that restoration was a major theme in the Old Testament, their central New Testament passage most often cited is Acts 3:21, “whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration of all things . . .” This is why Restorationist teachers like Dick Iverson and Earl Paulk teach that Christ cannot return at any-moment via the rapture. They teach that Christ is held in the heavens until the church has been restored and perfected, only then will He be free to return. I will show in a future article that Acts 3:21 and other passages cited by Restorationists refer to Israel and not the Church.

Restorationist David Blomgren, in his booklet *A Biblical View Of Restoration* defines restoration as follows:

The Biblical concept of restoration, therefore, comprises the work of God to restore the corporate church to the truth and power of God and to restore the individual believer to the image of God. (p. 2)

Blomgren’s definition includes two major restoration aspects, the first applies to the corporate church and the second to the individual believer.

the Holy Spirit was the “early rain” but the “latter rain” outpouring of the Holy Spirit will occur at the end-times. Many have taught that the Spirit will be poured out upon the church by A.D. 2000 in order to prepare her for the great evangelistic harvest to follow.

Often this great event is described in terms of Old Testament imagery of the army of locusts in Joel 2. In fact, “prophet,” Paul Cain, is said to have had a vision in which he saw a sign on a billboard from the Lord describing the current status of the church today as “Joel’s Army: Now In Training.” Many today have been influenced by this type of thinking and are adopting a more militant vocabulary for describing Christian activity, prayer, and worship because they believe they are now in training as God’s end-time army and are being made ready for coming events. Just as an army trains for war by learning to use their weapons and adapt to the harsh environment of the battlefield so the “new breed,” “the Omega army,” or “the forceful men” are preparing for spiritual warfare by sharpening their end-time skills.

A few years ago, when Dr. Jack Deere was an assistant pastor at John Wimber’s Vineyard Christian Fellowship in Anaheim, California, he gave a two-part message entitled “Joel’s Army.” His explanation of what the church is going to be like in just a few years is illuminating:

Heretofore in history we have only had one Moses on the scene. Only one Elijah. Only one Elisha at a time. Now among the Apostles we only have one Paul, then John, and Peter, a few of those that are really outstanding.

Heretofore we have only had one or two mighty servants of God on the face of the earth at a time. It is not true any longer. When this army comes, he says, it is large and it is mighty. It is so mighty that there has never been anything like it before. Not even Moses. Not even David. Not even Paul. What’s going to happen now will transcend what Paul did. What David did for me. What Moses did. Even though Moses parted the Red Sea. Something greater is coming in this army. And there won’t be just one Moses. They’ll be a numerous company. **See, Revelation hints at this when it talks about the 144,000 that follow the Lamb where ever He goes** (emphasis added). And no one can harm that 144,000. See, that’s a multiple of twelve. What’s twelve? Twelve is the number of the apostles. Twelve is apostolic government. And when you take an important number in the Bible and multiply it, that means you intensify it. So 12,000 times 12,000 equals 144,000. That is the ultimate in apostolic government. Revelation talks about that. Well, here Joel is talking about it now in different words. A powerful and mighty army with many Pauls, and many Moses, many Davids. (Tape 1)

Dr. Deere is saying that the latter rain revival will be carried out by those who are in Joel’s army, which he also equates with the 144,000 witnesses from Revelation 7. Dr. Deere has undergone amazing changes in his theology since the time when he was one of my Hebrew professors at Dallas Theological Seminary in the late 1970s.

HISTORY

Restoration and latter rain teachings did not just spring up out of thin air in this century, nor do I believe they are the result of a new prophetic revelation being given by the Lord as part of the current “new move” of God. Various aspects of the current doctrine can be found as far back as the early 1800s.

Mormonism

Joseph Smith built Mormonism in the 1820s on the foundation of alleged angelic visits and communications, with a claim that God was restoring prophetic gifts and authority from apostolic times in preparation for these latter days. Mormonism instituted twelve apostles and taught that “God’s direct intervention in human affairs had not ceased with the apostolic age; revelation was continuing to be expressed through Smith as God’s prophet.”¹ In fact, early Mormons were the first in modern times to advocate and practice “speaking in

tongues” as a sign of the restoration of apostolic times. (The parallels between Mormonism and some aspects of the third wave should cause great alarm to most evangelicals.)

Irvingites

Edward Irving (1792-1834), a defrocked Presbyterian minister, founded the Catholic Apostolic Church toward the end of his short but engaging life. Irving linked the restoration of apostolic Christianity with the nearness of the second coming, not the rapture. Irving believed that God was restoring apostles, prophets, healing, and the gift of tongues during the 1830s in the British Isles to prepare the true church for the return of Christ which he said would occur in 1868. Irving is credited with being the first to make the modern Pentecostal connection between speaking in tongues as the sign of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Irving appears to have also been the first to teach the need for the restoration of the fivefold offices of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers before the church could properly be made ready for the coming Bridegroom.² This “fivefold ministry” teaching is increasingly popular today within restoration and latter rain circles, which teach that in order for the church to be truly perfected to meet her soon coming Lord, all five of these ministries, including apostles and prophets, must be restored and functioning today.

Holiness Movement

As the 1800s progressed, there arose within Methodism a call to return to the holiness teachings of John Wesley who saw that “moral growth, or sanctification, is both progressive and instantaneous.”³ Phoebe Palmer, wife of a New York physician, was the most influential advocate of the holiness message about 150 years ago. “Palmer, like many others, also departed from Wesley by identifying the second moment of grace—or the second blessing, as it had come to be called—with the baptism of the Holy Spirit.”⁴ By the 1880s, this movement had spawned many independent churches and a few denominations like the Nazarene and Wesleyan holiness churches. Others, like Charles Finney and A. B. Simpson, made contributions to the development of this movement which became the fertile soil out of which the Pentecostal movement grew in the following century.

The latter rain teaching was also found within holiness teachings. An example is seen in Phoebe Palmer’s 1859 book—*The Promise of the Father*—where she uses “the latter rain argument to defend the ministry of women.”⁵ Charles Parham, the founder of Pentecostalism, was “impressed with the emphasis throughout the Holiness movement on a ‘latter rain’ outpouring of the Holy Spirit.”⁶ So we can see that the idea of a latter rain restoration and revival was anticipated by many holiness leaders who would later give birth to what they would come to believe was the start of this anticipated end-time revival—Pentecostalism.

Pentecostalism

Many Christians are aware that the Pentecostal movement began on January 1, 1901 in Topeka, Kansas when Agnes Ozman (1870-1937) spoke in tongues under the tutelage of Charles Fox Parham (1873-1929). Yet, how many realize that in the “early years Pentecostalism often took the name ‘Latter Rain Movement’?”⁷ This is because Parham titled his report of the new movement as “The Latter Rain: The Story of the Origin of the Original Apostolic or Pentecostal Movements.”⁸ Many are also aware that William J. Seymour (1870-1922) came under the influence of Parham in Houston, Texas in 1905 and then took the Pentecostal message to Azusa Street in Los Angeles in 1906, from where it was disseminated to the four-corners of the world. But, how many are also aware that he too spoke of these things in terms of a latter rain framework?

There is no doubt that the latter rain teaching was one of the major components in the foundation of Pentecostalism. “Modern Pentecostalism is the ‘latter rain,’ the special outpouring of the Spirit that restores the gifts in the last days as part of the preparation for the ‘harvest,’ the return of Christ in glory,” says Dayton.⁹ David Wesley Myland (1858-1943) was one of the early Pentecostal leaders. He wrote the first distinctly Pentecostal hymn entitled, “The Latter Rain” in 1906. The “first definitive Pentecostal theology that was widely distributed, the *Latter Rain Covenant*” appeared in 1910.¹⁰ Myland argued in his

book that “now we are in the Gentile Pentecost, the first Pentecost started the church, the body of Christ, and this, the second Pentecost, *unites* and *perfects* the church into the coming of the Lord.”¹¹

Dayton concludes that the “broader Latter Rain doctrine provided a key . . . premise in the logic of Pentecostalism.”¹² In spite of having such a key place in the thinking of early Pentecostalism, “the latter rain doctrine did tend to drop out of Pentecostalism” in the 1920s “only to reappear, however, in the radical Latter Rain revitalization movement of the 1940s.”¹³

(to be continued)

The "Latter Rain" Revival Movement

Part II

by Thomas Ice

In our previous issue, I began a series on a significant influence within Evangelicalism called “latter rain” theology. I began tracing its history and development and will continue in this installment. I hope to show that this theology distorts God's plan for history when they claim a latter day glory that is meant for Israel and not the church. I also hope to show that “latter rain” teachings confuse the current church age and the tribulation.

In the last installment, I was providing a historical rundown on restoration movements in general. I had surveyed the origins of Pentecostalism and how it was born out of a “latter rain” theology. This began to wane in the 1920's as Pentecostals adopted some of the tenants of fundamentalism, especially dispensationalism.

New Order of the Latter Rain

The late 1940s saw a reemergence of “latter rain” teachings at Sharon Orphanage and Schools in North Battleford, Saskatchewan, Canada, among Pentecostals. George Hawtin and P. G. Hunt were key figures in North Battleford, who along with others, launched a movement characterized by the following distinctives:

- (1) William Branham, who exercised the laying on of hands in his healing ministry;
- (2) healing evangelist Franklin Hall’s emphasis on fasting and prayer;
- (3) the church government format in use by the Independent Assemblies of God, which stressed the autonomy of the local church; and
- (4) the emphasis on the “new thing” of Isaiah 43:19.¹⁴

As the movement continued to develop it spawned a large collection of teachings, terms, and vocabulary for communicating “latter rain” thought. While many of the following terms have true biblical significance, I want to list some of the words and phrases often associated with “latter rain” doctrine so that readers will be able to discern whether a given phrase is used in a “latter rain” context.

Feast of Tabernacles	Tabernacle of Moses
Tabernacle of David	Revival churches
Present day truths	Five-fold ministry
Manifested sons of God	Spiritual Israel
Bride company	New breed
Joel’s army	Elijah Company
Many-membered man child	Jezebel spirit
Birthing in the spirit	Overcomers
Covering	Joshua Generation
New thing	Omega Army
Forceful men	

The latter rain movement has created quite a stir among Pentecostals. At the 1949 General Council of the Assemblies of God meeting in Seattle, Washington, a resolution was adopted disapproving of the practices of the "latter rain" movement.

RESOLVED, That we disapprove of those extreme teachings and practices which, being unfounded Scripturally, serve only to break fellowship of like precious faith and tend to confusion and division among the members of the Body of Christ, and be it hereby known that this 23rd General Council disapproves of the so-called, "New Order of the Latter Rain", to wit:

1. The overemphasis relative to imparting, identifying, bestowing or confirming gifts by the laying on of hands and prophesy.
2. The erroneous teaching that the church is built upon the foundation of present day apostles and prophets.
3. The extreme teaching as advocated by the "new order" regarding the confession of sin to man and deliverance as practiced, which claims prerogatives to human agency which belong only to Christ.
4. The erroneous teaching concerning the impartation of the gift of languages as special equipment for missionary service.
5. The extreme and unscriptural practice imparting or imposing personal leading by the means of utterance.
6. Such other wrestings and distortions of Scripture, interpretations which are in opposition to teachings and practices generally accepted among us.¹⁵

"Latter rain" teachings are also said to have made significant inroads into the Charismatic movement of the 1960s and '70s. Some of the "beliefs and practices of the Latter Rain that found their way into the Charismatic renewal were the 'foundational ministries' of Ephesians 4:11, tabernacle teaching, the feast of Tabernacles, and the 'foundational truths' of Hebrews 6:1-2."¹⁶ Vehicles within the Charismatic movement favoring "latter rain" distinctives included *Logos Journal* and the Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship International headed by Demos Shakarian.

Third Time's The Charm

The 1980s saw a third wave of "latter rain" teachings within the Pentecostal/Charismatic movement. However, this time the latter rain/restoration teachings are not content to merely sit back and be a part of only a spiritual revival, without the power displays of "signs, wonders, and miracles." Today's blend wants power, dominion, health and wealth, and socio-political change. The contemporary onslaught of "latter rain" teaching has virtually taken over today's Pentecostal/Charismatic movement. As we stand on the threshold of the one hundredth anniversary of the birth of the Pentecostal/latter rain movement, it is, without a doubt, the strongest influence within Evangelicalism.

Typical of a contemporary "latter rain" event was the "Take It By Force Conference" in Phoenix, August 1-4, 1989, sponsored by an organization called "The Forceful Men." A six-page, full-color ad announcing the conference was run in the May, 1989 issue of *Charisma*. The militant tone was set when the copy announced that "God is raising up a new generation to shake this world, a Joshua generation, ' . . . invade, conquer and possess the land.'" The main section of the ad displayed across the top four famous Pentecostal events, implying that the Take It By Force conference would have continuity with them. One of the events listed was the latter rain revival in 1948 at North Battleford, Saskatchewan, Canada. The ad said concerning North Battleford: "God promised that He would restore everything that the church had lost." Typical "latter rain" belief.

Until recently, "latter rain" formulation was placing great stress upon their prophecy that Christ will return around A.D. 2000, thus making the 1990s the time when the Church will come together and experience the great end-time harvest. "Latter rain" teaches that the maturity of the Church will be accomplished through the restoration of the gifted men mentioned in Ephesians 4:11. This viewpoint, received as a new, prophetic revelation and

not based on interpretation of the text, believes that the 1950s saw the restoration of evangelists; the 1960s the pastor; the 1970s the teacher; the 1980s the prophet; and the 1990s will see a revived office of apostles. The result of this supposed return to first century Christianity will reap the following result:

The restoration of the apostle to full recognition and authority will bring the Church to maturity, unity, and proper Church structure. Signs and wonders will be wrought which will cause the world to look to the Church for answers and miracles needed. Whole nations will turn to God. The Church will become glorious and victorious and cause the glory of the Lord to fill the earth as the waters cover the sea. When all five-fold ministries are fully restored, all the saints are moving in their membership ministry, and the Church is unified and perfected, when Jesus can return and set up His Kingdom and establish His eternal reign with His Bride/Church. Planet Earth will be purified to become the headquarters for Jesus and His Church to rule and reign over His vast domain forever and ever and ever forevermore. Amen!¹⁷

This version of restoration/latter rain appears to be a blend of postmillennialism and premillennialism. Some postmillennialists have taught that the kingdom will dominate planet earth when a majority of the population is converted and the church is perfected. Bill Hamon has taken that postmillennial idea and placed it within a non-dispensational premillennial framework. Hamon's type of premillennialism sees the church age ending in victory, not apostasy, as dispensationalism believes. After all, "latter rain" Pentecostalism is the end-time perfection of the church to which things are building. At least, that's what they say.

How does this blend look? When talking about the *current role* and destiny of the church, Restorationists speak of her eventual victory before Christ returns. This is a postmillennial concept. However, when speaking about *future events* such as the second coming, they are premillennial. Thus, they hold to a form of postmillennialism wrapped within the overall framework and vocabulary of non-dispensational premillennialism, which is extremely vocal in their objection to the pretribulational rapture.

Restorationist Rick Godwin typifies this aggressive blend of a postmillennial view of a current victorious and glorious church coupled with anti-rapture rhetoric.

The Lord is going to have a "Glorious Church" before He returns. . . . The Glorious Church is to be a mighty army of over-comers through whom God reveals and demonstrates Himself to man. . . . We are to be an army on the offensive, taking the fight to the enemy, instead of sitting around waiting for the Rapture. We are not instructed to "Hold the Fort"—we are to TAKE THE LAND! . . . Over infatuation with the Rapture produces a stagnant and sterile people. The OVERCOMER doesn't care WHEN Jesus comes—He is simply "occupying until He comes." (emphasis in original)¹⁸
"Latter rain" advocate, Rick Joyner says,

This is the hour when the church will arise as never before to aggressively attack every stronghold of the enemy. A divine militancy is coming upon the church that will strike gripping fear into the heart of every power of darkness. . . .

The church will not abandon the world in defeat, fleeing when her light is needed the most. She is about to rise to her full spiritual stature.¹⁹

Increasingly, many are adopting this mentality of victory, coupled with anti-rapture oratory.

An Uneasy Marriage

Perhaps by now you are asking that question that would naturally arise at this point: "If Pentecostalism has such a rich and obvious history of 'latter rain' teaching, then why do they

also have a rich history of many who object to such teachings?" In fact, virtually all of the material I have read over the past few years raising objections and warning people about restoration/latter rain doctrine and practice have come from Pentecostals themselves. Why is this?

It is not unusual within any movement as large and diverse as Pentecostalism that rival camps of thought would arise. In addition to the "latter rain" influence, dispensationalism has also added its imprint upon Pentecostalism. While it may be true, that these two systems are antithetical to one another in many ways, it is nevertheless a fact that both have had great popularity and influence at various times within Pentecostalism. Based upon current trends it seems obvious that the overall movement is clearly moving away from dispensationalism. This was clearly illustrated to Robert Dean and I when we had a four-hour discussion with three leaders from the Kansas City Fellowship of Churches in the early 1990's. They informed us that out of approximately 45 staff members, not one currently held to the pretrib rapture. Very likely, almost all had held the view a few years earlier.

Early Pentecostalism was born out of a motivation and vision for restoring to the church apostolic power lost over the years. Now she was to experience her latter-day glory and victory by going out in a blaze of glory and success. On the other hand, dispensationalism was born in England in the early 1800s bemoaning the latter-day apostasy and ruin of the church. These two major streams within Pentecostalism have radically different views of the church and the end times.

The latter rain teaching came out of the Wesleyan-Holiness desire for both individual (sanctification) and corporate (eschatological) perfection. This is why early perfectionist teachers like Wesley, Finney, and Mahan were all postmillennial and social activists. Revivalism was gaged by both personal and public change or perfection. It follows then that one who believes in personal perfection should also believe that public perfection is equally possible. Those who believe the latter are postmillennialists. After all, if God has given the Holy Spirit in this age to do either, then why not the other? If God can perfect individuals, then why not society?

However, as the 1800s turned into the 1900s, social change was increasingly linked with Darwin's theory of evolution. The evolutionary rationale was then used to attack the Bible itself. To most English-speaking Christians it certainly appeared that society was not being perfected, instead it was in decline. Critics of the Bible said that one needed a PhD from Europe before the Bible could be organized and understood. It was into this climate that dispensationalism was introduced into America and to many Bible believing Christians it made much more sense of the world than did liberalism.

Dispensationalism, in contrast to Holiness teaching, taught that the world and the church (visible) was not being perfected, instead it was in apostasy and heading toward judgment. God is currently in the process of calling out the remnant through the preaching of the gospel. Christian social change would not be permanent, leading to the establishment of Christ's kingdom. Instead a cataclysmic intervention was needed (Christ's second coming), if society was to be transformed. Another emphasis was that the common man could understand the Bible without the enlightened help of a liberal education, once he understood God's overall plan for mankind as administered through the dispensations. Thus, dispensational theology made a lot of sense to both Pentecostal and evangelical believers during this time.

In the 1920s dispensationalism began to have a great influence within Pentecostalism. Pentecostal Huibert Zegwaart has noted that "Many of the early Pentecostals came from dispensationalist circles."²⁰ Donald Dayton said that the form of Pentecostal eschatology, "namely dispensationalism, is quite accidental; it happened to be the form of eschatology the early Pentecostals brought along from their former denominations."²¹ Thus, denominations like the Assemblies of God moved away from doctrines like the "latter rain" teaching and generated official positions against those teachings.

CONCLUSION

As we enter the new millennium, dispensational influence, for a lot of reasons, is on the decline within both Evangelicalism and Pentecostalism as well. Thus, things like the pretrib rapture (once considered orthodoxy within Pentecostalism) are likewise on the decline. At the same time such "latter rain" teachings as the present glory and victory of the church before the second coming (a form of postmillennialism) are rapidly gaining popularity.

The attractiveness of the perfection of the church teachings within "latter rain" theology is making a comeback within the church at the same time that concepts of perfection are increasingly popular within secular society as well. "Techno-mysticism," in the form of self-help and New Age teachings proclaim the mystical perfectibility of the individual as well as society. Thus, people today are predisposed toward, not a moral perfection as heralded 100 years ago, but rather a mystical, metaphysical transformation which could happen in an instant of time.

The Pentecostal/Charismatic movement has a tradition of both latter rain/restoration teachings as well as a dispensational stream. However, at many points, these are contradictory teachings which appear to be on a collision course. Either the church age is going to end with perfection and revival of the church or it will decline into apostasy, preparing the way for the church to become the harlot of Revelation during the tribulation.

(To Be Continued . . .)

The "Latter Rain" Revival Movement

Part III

by Thomas Ice

What is at stake in our examination of the "latter rain" teachings is the issue of God's plan and purpose for the current Church Age in which we live and how it relates to the yet future tribulation. I believe the Bible teaches that the Church Age is a distinct time in which God is calling out from among the Gentiles a people (Acts 15:14-18), who are combined into one new man with the Jewish remnant of this age (Eph. 2—3). Does the Bible teach that the course of the Church Age will include a time of restoration, revival, or a "latter rain" revival? No! Thus, the need to examine these teachings and contrast them with what the Bible does teach.

In previous issues I have probed into the nature and development of "latter rain"/restoration teachings. This article will begin a comparison of these teachings and interpretations of the Bible to see if they are supported by God's Word. This involves an interaction with some of their foundational doctrines as well as an examination of key passages from Scripture. It is my contention that while many within these traditions use words and phrases from the Bible, they are not used in the way in which God has intended in Scripture. I believe at many crucial points they mishandle God's Word.

KEY THEOLOGICAL CONCEPTS AND PASSAGES

Restoration

"Latter rain" teachers say that the church began at a high point and then began a path of decline. Around A.D. 1200 the decline bottomed out and began upward progress toward the full restoration which they teach we are on the verge of seeing in our day. The first question that comes to my mind is what passages from the Bible teach this?

Many passages teach that God's program for Israel includes a time of decline, scattering, regathering, and restoration (Deut. 4:25-31; 30:1-10). However, no such pattern is stated concerning God's plan for the Church.

The parables of Matthew 13 speak of the interadvent age between Christ's two comings and describe it as a time of preaching (sowing) the gospel yielding varied responses (mostly rejection). These parables indicate that the growth of Christendom will start out small and become large. However, nothing is said in this passage about the

spiritual qualities during this time, unless, leaven implies the growth and spread of apostasy. The New Testament is silent regarding a restoration for the Church.

Acts 3:21 is a major passage to which Restorationist point in an attempt to give Scriptural support to their views. Acts 3:19-21 says, *"Repent therefore and return, that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time."* Restorationist Dick Iverson says of this passage, "These are times when God will give the Church that which was lost."²² Instead, Iverson *should* have said, "These are times when God will give Israel that which was lost." If this refers to Israel and not the church then Iverson is wrong. It is clear from the context that Peter is speaking to Israel and not the church. It is the remnant within Israel that believed in Jesus as their Messiah and made up the church. He could not be speaking to the church since they were the ones who were repenting and returning to the Lord.

If a father were to give a large amount of money to one of his two children and he wrote a letter to inform the child of his gift, which was intercepted and read by the second child, it would not follow that the second child could rightly claim the treasure merely by reading the first child's mail. So it is with the Bible. Scripture written to and referencing Israel are meant for Israel, even though another party may read them and gain insight and appreciation for their common father. Letters addressed to the church speak of things the Father has for her and not Israel. Therefore, it is important, especially when examining prophetic passages, to know to whom He is addressing.

Now let us look at some specific points from this passage so that we might come to understand it in its intended context. First, as in his Acts 2 sermon, Peter is speaking to a Jewish audience whom he has accused of crucifying Christ. Notice the terms he used in verses 13-15 to heap guilt upon Israel: *"you delivered up and disowned," "but you disowned," "but [you] put to death the Prince of life."* In verse 17 Peter told the Jewish crowd that they had *"acted in ignorance,"* which set the stage for his call for them to repent and accept Jesus as their Messiah and the Messiah of Israel. Then, after they accept Jesus as Messiah (Zech. 12:10), their promised Millennial Kingdom would be established, called by Peter in this passage the *"times of refreshing."*

Second, another confirmation that Peter is talking about Israel's Kingdom is seen in the noun "restoration" (3:21). The same word is used as a verb in Acts 1:6 when the disciples kept asking Jesus before His ascension, *"Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?"* Even after forty days of the Lord *"speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God"* (Acts 1:3), His disciples were wondering about the timing of the arrival of Israel's kingdom. Notice, the Lord's teaching did not change their basic view of the kingdom, instead their questions revolve around the TIMING of the kingdom. As the reader follows the flow of the context in the early chapters of Acts, it is clear that this is the same concern Peter is addressing to the group in chapter three. He proclaims that the condition for the coming of the kingdom is to accept Jesus as Israel's Messiah, something that will take place at the end of the tribulation period.

Third, the Old Testament did not predict the Church, but it did predict the coming of the Messianic kingdom. The New Testament clearly reveals that the church was a mystery (secret) in Old Testament times. This is not merely the logical conclusion of applying the literal hermeneutic and observing that the Church is not foreseen in the Old Testament. Instead, passages explicitly declare this. Romans 16:25-26, *"according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past, but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets."* Ephesians 3:1-9, *"you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit . . ."* (4-5) *". . . to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God"* (9). Colossians 1:24-28, *"which is the church . . ." "the mystery which has been hidden from the {past} ages and generations; but has now been manifested to His saints"*

(26). These passages tell us that the current age was a mystery during Old Testament times. Therefore, how could references to Old Testament passages and events be predictive of God's plan for the Church? They cannot! Once again, restoration/"latter rain" teachers are (mis)applying passages which refer to Israel and wrongly linking them to the Church. This results in the twisting and distortion of Scripture.

In a desperate attempt to support their views of the restoration of the church, Restorationists sometimes present a study of the word "restore" from the Bible.²³ The result of these studies demonstrate that there is not one passage that even comes close to supporting their thesis of a last days restoration for the church. Many passages speak of Israel's restoration, but not a single passage speaks of a time of restoration of the church.

Another problem that arises from confusing God's plan for Israel with that of the Church in Acts 3:21 is stated by Dick Iverson.

We notice also that Christ cannot return until all that the prophets spoke be fulfilled. Many people think that Christ could come at any minute. He could come for them any minute, but He will not come for the Church until all be fulfilled. In fact, the heavens MUST retain Him against that time, for when He returns He is coming for a fully restored Church—a Church that is glorious, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing.²⁴

Earl Paulk of Atlanta, takes a similar position in his book *Held In The Heavens Until*. . .²⁵ Iverson is correct if this passage refers to the church, but he is woefully wrong if it refers to God's plan for Israel instead; as it does. Error built upon error multiplies error and causes one to miss what the passage is actually teaching. Acts 3:21 is only one of many passages which speak of a precondition for the second coming in relation to Israel (cf. Zech. 12:10; Matt. 23:37-39), however, there are no passages relating to any preconditions for the rapture of the church as Restorationists suppose.

Since there are no passages in the Bible supporting a restoration of the church, what does the New Testament teach about the course of the current age? It teaches that this age will be a time in which the Gospel is to be preached by believers throughout the age. God will be saving some through faith in Christ as the gospel is preached. However, it will also be a time of persecution for believers (John 15:18-24; 16:32-33) and increasing apostasy of Christendom (2 Tim. 3:13), during which time believers are encouraged to remain faithful to Christ regardless of the trends and pressures (2 Tim. 3:14).

Apart from a few exceptions, the church age is not a time of prophetic fulfillment. Instead, prophecy will be fulfilled after the rapture, in relation to God's dealing with the nation of Israel in the seven-year tribulation. The current church age, in which believers live today, does not have a specific prophetic countdown or timetable, as does Israel and her 70 weeks of years prophecy (Daniel 9:14-27). The New Testament does, however, provide general traits that characterize the church age in the following major passages: Matthew 13; Revelation 2—3; 1 Timothy 4:1-3; 2 Timothy 3:1-5; 4:3-4; James 5:1-8; 2 Peter 2:1-22; 3:3-6; Jude 1-25. Even though specific prophecy is not given concerning the present church age, these passages do paint a general picture of the course of this age. All indicate that apostasy will characterize Christendom during the time when this age ends with the rapture.

On the other hand, a specific outline of Israel's history was given at the time of the birth of the nation (about 1400 B.C.). God told Moses in Deuteronomy 4:15-40 that when the nation arrived in their promised land that they would disobey the Lord and be disciplined by being scattered throughout the Gentile nations. Then one day they would be gathered out from the peoples of the world and be restored to their ancient land and would be blessed. This would happen "*in the latter days,*" declares the Lord, when "*you will return to the LORD your God and listen to His voice*" (4:30). Restoration is for Israel during the tribulation, not for the church.

(To Be Continued . . .)

The "Latter Rain" Revival Movement
Part IV
by Thomas Ice

In a continuation of the fourth installment of our study of the "latter rain" movement, I will pursue a study begun last month on key theological concepts and passages. Previously I began this section with an investigation of the idea of "restoration" within the "latter rain" tradition. I now turn to an examination of their notion of "spiritual Israel."

KEY THEOLOGICAL CONCEPTS AND PASSAGES

Spiritual Israel

Another common technique used by Restorationist and "latter rain" advocates is to say that the Church is now spiritual Israel. They believe that they then have the right to take the volumes of passages, often from the prophets, and link them spiritually to the Church. Therefore, Israel is finished in God's plan as a nation, while individual Jews may come to faith in Christ; the Church inherits the promises made to Israel in some spiritual way. Restorationist Rick Godwin is an example of this view.

So we see in Abraham the birthing of two seeds: the nation of Israel physically and the spiritual nation of Israel—the Church. And if I hear one more person say, "Ahhh, there ain't no such thing as the spiritual Israel." I'm going to vomit all over 'em. What are we reading? For God sake, get rid of that Judaistic spirit after the flesh and we'll find out what the real Jew is! You'll find out God has never been and is not now a racist. Ever! The Church is. God isn't. Never has been."²⁶

Well, Rick, there is no such thing as spiritual Israel. Watch out below!

Let's look at this matter more closely. The Church IS the spiritual seed of Abraham, but NOT spiritual Israel. The Bible does say that "if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring" (Gal. 3:29). It does not say that New Testament, Church Age believers are spiritual Israel. Was Abraham an Israelite? No, but he was the father of Isaac, who was the father of Jacob or Israel. Abraham became the source of blessing to both Jew and Gentile.

Too often those who want to replace physical Israel with the Church do it by stretching the term "seed of Abraham" to all of a sudden mean "spiritual Israel." Charles Ryrie has noted that those who hold to a spiritual Israel view "often argue that since the Church is the seed of Abraham and Israel is the seed of Abraham, the Church equals Israel."²⁷ Ryrie answers that view by clarifying the proper relationship of the Church to the seed of Abraham by saying that "the Church is a seed of Abraham, but this does not mean that the Church is Israel."²⁸ Ryrie notes the three ways the Bible uses the term "seed of Abraham:

- (1) There is the natural seed, the physical descendants of Abraham— . . . (Isa. 41:8).
- (2) There is Christ— . . . (Gal. 3:16).
- (3) Christians are Abraham's seed— . . . (Gal. 3:29).²⁹

Those who believe in a future destiny for physical Israel do not deny that the Church is part of the spiritual blessing flowing out of the Abrahamic Covenant through Christ. However, we do not believe that the Bible teaches that the Church replaces Israel, as do many. In this instance it is a "both/and" situation, not an "either/or" choice.

Paul makes it clear in Romans 15:27 that Gentiles during the Church Age "have shared in their (Israel's) spiritual things." Therefore, as sharers, he does not mean taker-overs. We are not spiritual Israel! Who, then, is spiritual Israel?

I think that the Bible uses the concept of spiritual Israel to refer to physical Israelites or Jews who are regenerate believers in Jesus as the Messiah. In other words, they are spiritual (born again) Jews or Israelites. Just as the term “spiritual Gentile” would refer to a Gentile who has a relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

Paul is saying in Romans 2:28-29, when he states “*he is not a Jew who is one outwardly . . . but he is a Jew who is one inwardly,*” that just because one is a physical Jew does not mean that He is saved and going to heaven. There are two kinds of Jews, those who do not know God through Christ, but are racial Jews (physical Jews), and those who are physical Jews, as well as spiritual Jews, who know God through Christ.

These spiritual Jews are the ones Paul is greeting as he closes his letter to the Galatians: “*peace and mercy be upon them and upon the Israel of God*” (6:16). After having been so rough on the Judaizers—Israel after the flesh only—he concludes with a greeting to those within the family of God who are Jews, but are believing Jews; called in this passage by Paul “the Israel of God.” S. Lewis Johnson, in an essay where he studies the meaning of the term “Israel of God,” concludes:

If there is an interpretation that totters on a tenuous foundation, it is the view that Paul equates the term “the Israel of God” with the believing church of Jews and Gentiles. To support it, the general usage of the term *Israel* in Paul, in the New Testament, and in the Scriptures as a whole is ignored. . . . If, as LaRondelle asserts, “Paul’s benediction in Galatians 6:16 becomes, then, the chief witness in the New Testament in declaring that the universal church of Christ is the Israel of God, the seed of Abraham, the heir to Israel’s covenant promise (cf. Gal. 3:29; 6:16),” then the doctrine that the church of Gentiles and Jews is *the* Israel of God rests on an illusion. It is a classic case of tendentious exegesis.”³⁰

Apostasy or Revival?

Another important area where Restorationist and “latter rain” advocates have missed the teaching of Scripture is in regard to the state of the Church as this age draws to its end? Will it end in revival or will it sink increasingly into apostasy? They fail to realize that the Church, in its overall posture, cannot be characterized by both revival and apostasy at the same time. This is an “either/or” issue. Rick Godwin has said,

The Lord is going to have a “Glorious Church” before He returns. . . . For years the belief was that we would never have another revival, . . . We utterly reject that line of thinking in light of clear Scripture. The Glorious Church is to be a mighty army of over-comers through whom God reveals and demonstrates Himself to man.³¹

The Bible does not teach that the Church will be this mighty army of overcomers, in the way Godwin envisions. Once again, his “support” is taken from passages which refer to Israel and not the Church. He misuses verses that refer to believers during the tribulation period, after the Church has been removed.

Let’s look at what the words “revival” and “apostasy” mean as used by Christians today. A “revival” includes evangelist success but usually means more than that. It often is used to refer to the stirring up of Christians who rededicate themselves to living a more committed life on behalf of our Lord. Effectiveness of a “revival” is sometimes gauged by the social and political change which results from the impact of those who have been stirred to action. On the other hand, “apostasy” does not refer to whether a small or large numbers of individuals are coming to Christ at a given point in time. Instead, it is concerned with the theological or doctrinal integrity of the Church. This is why a believer can always preach the gospel with confidence during the whole of the Church Age knowing that God is at work bringing sinners to Himself, even until the very end.

The New Testament, especially the Epistles, clearly teach that the whole of the Church Age is a time of increasing apostasy within Christendom. In fact, so much space is spent in the New Testament dealing with the issue of apostasy that it has to be considered one of its major themes. Apostasy constitutes the main theme of entire books and chapters as well as paragraphs and verses in the New Testament. Apostasy and its evil effects provide the main message of such books as First and Second Timothy, Second Peter, and Jude. Apostasy occupies a prominent place in such books as Galatians, Second Thessalonians, Hebrews and Revelation. Apostasy and apostates are set forth with varying degrees of detail as to their character and conduct, influence and teaching. Believers are warned to know how to recognize them and Christian leaders are supposed to protect their flocks from them and their unhealthy doctrine. Apostasy is doctrinal error, not how many will or will not be saved, whether or not the economy will be good or bad, or how moral or immoral society will be. The focus of apostasy is not secular society, but what is going on within the Church itself. When the great amount of New Testament Scripture, dealing with apostasy within the Church, is compared with the absence of language speaking of the victory of the Church, in the sense that restoration and "latter rain" advocates suggest, then there is zero basis for their opinion found in the Word of God. The Bible does speak of individuals who are overcomers, but that proves the point, since they are contrasted with apostates. Victory language in the New Testament applies to individual believers, not the Church as a whole. Notice the chart which lists the references to apostasy in the New Testament.

APOSTASY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

GOSPELS*

Matthew 12:14-37; 13:1-52; 15:12; 23:1-36; 24:10-28

Mark 6:21-30

Luke 8:13-18

John 6:60-71; 8:31-59; 13:21-30; 15:18-27

ACTS

Acts 8:8-24; 13:4-12; 20:17-35

PAUL'S EPISTLES

Romans 1:18-32; 10; 16:17-18

2 Corinthians 11:1-15; 13:5

Galatians 1:6-9; 5:1-12

Philippians 3:2, 18-19

Colossians 2:4-23

2 Thessalonians 2:1-12

1 Timothy 1:3-7; 4:1-3; 6:3-5

2 Timothy 2:11-26; 3:1-14; 4:1-6

Titus 1:10-16

GENERAL EPISTLES

Hebrews 2:1-4; 3:7—4:13; 5:12—6:12; 10:26-31; 12:14-17

1 Peter 3:19-20

2 Peter 2:1-22; 3:3-10

1 John 2:18-23; 3:4-12; 4:1-6

2 John 9

Jude 3-23

REVELATION

Revelation 2:1—3:22; 4:1—5:14; 6:1—10:11; 11:1—15:8; 16:1—19:24; 19:1—20:15³²

* Incomplete listings

I take no pleasure in the apostasy theme of the New Testament, but we all must acknowledge this point in an effort to call the Church away from apostasy. The sobering fact is clear: either the restoration/"latter rain" movement is a heaven sent revival from God or it is part of the end-time apostasy preparing the way for the coming Antichrist. It cannot be both. We all must decide! No one can be neutral on this issue! If it is the great revival supposedly predicted for the end-times, then all true believers must join the band wagon. If it is not, then all true believers should have enough biblical sense to come in out of the latter rain apostasy. These are important issues.

(To Be Continued . . .)

The "Latter Rain" Revival Movement

Part V

by Thomas Ice

After presenting an overview of the central role that the doctrine of apostasy plays in New Testament teaching, I will continue in this installment of the "latter rain" series by examining key "latter rain" issues in the light of Scripture. These are important contemporary items since they provide a challenge to those of us who interpret Scripture literally, believe in the pretrib rapture, and recognize God's distinction between His plans for Israel and the Church. These errors must be recognized and refuted from Scripture.

KEY THEOLOGICAL CONCEPTS AND PASSAGES

Restoration of the Fivefold Ministries

In a previous issue³³ I noted Bill Hamon's explanation of the restoration of the fivefold ministries of evangelists, pastors, teachers, apostles, and prophets in the end-time.³⁴ This is said by Restorationist to be spoken of in Ephesians 4:11-16. Fellow "latter rain" advocate, Rick Joyner, claims that he received the contents of a book he authored called *The Harvest*, as a revelation from God on three different occasions in the late 1980s.³⁵ "What is about to come upon the earth is not just a revival, or another awakening; it is a veritable revolution," says Joyner about the vision he claims from God in his book. "This vision was given in order to begin awakening those who are destined to radically change the course, and even the very definition of Christianity."³⁶ Joyner spoke in his book about the restoration of apostles and prophets in order to prepare the Church for the soon coming fullness of the "latter rain." He said,

The next spiritual contraction will bring about the restoration and recognition of the PROPHETS. We will see the prophetic ministry become the primary focus of attention during the next few years as a much greater anointing comes upon this ministry than has been seen since Biblical times.³⁷

There will be another contraction during which a true APOSTOLIC authority will be restored and recognized within the advancing church.³⁸

"Latter rain" advocates like Hamon and Joyner commingle their interpretations of the Scripture with their own supposed direct revelation about the restoration of the gifted men in Ephesians 4:11. Their notions are erroneous for a number of reasons. A major objection is rather obvious to anyone who would simply read the passage. The passage says nothing about a restoration of these ministries. Simply put, the text does not speak of such an occurrence. They have pulled this concept out of the thin air of their fertile imaginations that they claim as a revelation from God. The New Testament warns against those who would have such a seared conscience that they would be bold enough to pass of their own

imaginings as the sure Word of God (Acts 20:17-35; 1 Tim. 4:1-2; 2 Pet. 2:1-3; 1 John 4:1-6; Jude 8, 17-19).

Christ's giving of apostles and prophets to the Church is said in Ephesians 2:20 to be something which is to be foundational to the Church, not something given to each generation of believers. The passage says, "*having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone.*" The picture is that of a building process which is going on during the entire period of the Church age, from Pentecost to the rapture. This process can be described as taking place in three stages: Phase one is the laying of the corner stone, which describes the first century, non-repeatable, work of Christ. The rest of the building is supposed to orient itself in terms of Christ the corner stone.

Phase two is the foundation of the apostles and prophets, which also occurred in the first century and is non-repeatable. However, just as with Christ, even though it is non-repeatable, it does not mean that it is non-applicable for today. Just as with a foundation in a physical building, once it is laid, continues to be used for the life of the structure. So it is with the ministry of the apostles and prophets, who gave us the boundaries of the gospel and doctrine with which believers are being used of God to build Christ's Church. Once the foundation is laid, you don't keep relaying it each generation, instead you continue to build upon it.

Phase three represents the superstructure of the rest of the building. The building is built upon in accordance to the guidelines mandated by the dimensions of the corner stone and the foundation. This work began at the birth of the Church in Acts 2 and will be completed at the rapture when the last person destined to make up the final component of the Body of Christ believes the gospel. Then the Church will be complete.

From the perspective of the Biblical picture presented in Ephesians 2, it is wrong to say that God is restoring apostles and prophets in our own day. This error implies that the first century foundation was not complete and that it needs further work. This would mean that until recent restoration times, God has been building the house upon a shaky foundation. This kind of thought is a grave error.

Ephesians 3:5 echoes the thought of 2:20 when Paul says concerning the mystery of Christ: "*which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit.*" The emphasis in this passage is upon revelation received during the time of Paul's writing in the first century. This strongly suggests that the ministry of apostles and prophets was completed in the past.

When we come to the Ephesians 4:11 use of apostles and prophets, with evangelists, and pastors-teachers, we observe a division of labor employed in the building of God's spiritual temple—the Church. The foundation, phase two, was completed during the apostolic age ending around A.D. 100. Upon completion, those workmen left the scene, leaving behind the trustworthy the fruit of their labor—a foundation. That foundation was the New Testament canon of Scripture.

Phase three is entrusted with the task of building upon the sure foundation of Christ and the apostles. This is why the bulk of labor, over the life of the project (the Church age) is done by the evangelist, and the pastor-teachers. They remain on site until the structure is complete at the rapture. This is why the Pastoral Epistles (1 and 2 Timothy and Titus) stress the importance of following and protecting the fixed deposit of Apostolic faith by faithful men, so that it can be passed from generation to generation (2 Tim. 2:2). Therefore, evangelist, and pastor-teachers have never been removed from the scene so that they have to be restored at the end of the Church age as "latter rain" advocates teach.

The Holy Spirit has been using believers to win and disciple others for the last 2,000 years *without interruption*, as taught by the Restorationist movement. The Church is being perfected with the original doctrine contained in the New Testament and does not need an updated version of "Apostles' doctrine 2.1." The first edition did not have any glitches and cannot be improved upon. Why would anyone want to bring the foundation crew back on the job when the roof is near completion, unless they want to improperly change the

foundation with their new revelation. Yet, the desire to add to the foundation, when it has already been set, is the desire and practice of false prophets and teachers. The believer who opens themselves up to “new revelation” is opening themselves up to deception. As Paul told Timothy, *“Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. Guard, through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to you”* (2 Tim. 1:13-14).

This is the Church’s calling in our day: to guard the foundation laid by Christ, and the apostles and prophets, while building upon that foundation the superstructure through evangelism and discipleship. Believers are looking forward to the return of Christ at the rapture, not for new revelation.

A Perfect Church?

Restorationist Rick Godwin has been described by a former Southern Baptist pastor, Jack Taylor, as “God’s John Wayne to the Church!”³⁹ Probably a more accurate description would be to liken Godwin to Rambo since John Wayne had manners and was a gentleman. Godwin states his belief that the Church will be perfected before Christ’s return:

The Lord is going to have a “Glorious Church” before He returns. This thought encompasses the theme of personal and corporate purity, for Scripture says that His Church will be “without spot, wrinkle or blemish.” His Church will have Power followed by signs and wonders, for Scripture says, “it will be a glorious church.”⁴⁰

Ephesians 5:25-27 is the much quoted passage which “latter rain”/Restorationist use to teach that the end-time Church will see the restoration of apostolic power, coupled with unity, which will produce the greatest period of miracles and conversions to Christ in all of history. However, to draw such a conclusion from this passage provides a clear example of their ability to mishandle Scripture. *“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her; that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless”* (Eph. 5:25-27).

There is no question that this passage speaks of a glorious church, without sport or wrinkle. But *how* does the Bible use these terms? Do Restorationists use this passage in the same way the Bible does? I believe they do not! In a nutshell, the Bible here describes the believer’s legal standing before God, as won on our behalf through Christ’s work on the cross. On the other hand, Restorationist (mis)apply this text as something which the believer and the Church must grow into and become in our current experience.

God’s plan of salvation is often discussed in terms of one’s covenantal standing before God. This is legal language. When Adam fell, his sin was imputed or credited to the legal bank account of every person born thereafter, even though no one personally committed Adam’s sin (Rom. 5:12-21). Our legal standing (some call this positional truth) forms the basis from which our experience should follow. Therefore, human beings sin experientially because they are legally or positionally sinners. In the same way, Christ had to first deal with the legal barrier of sin in winning salvation for the Church as the basis for experiential change in the life of the individual believer and the Church as a whole. Positional standing in Christ is the basis upon which the believer is to live his life experientially through faith.

When properly interpreting Scripture, one must establish from Scripture itself, the way the Bible uses various terms. Often a decision must be made as to whether or not a word or phrase is describing a positional truth or an experiential aspect of salvation. The difference it makes in the interpretation of Ephesians 5:25-27 is great. If these are positional terms, then the perfection spoken of in this passage is that earned by Christ through His saving work, which is applied positionally to the believer. This means that our position will not be experienced in its fullness until glorification at the time of the resurrection. However, if

these are taken experientially, as applying to our current time, then it is teaching experiential perfection of the individual believer as well corporate perfection.

In my final installment on “latter rain” theology, I will complete the study of Ephesians 5:25-27 and provide reasons why this passage should be interpreted positionally. I will also draw implications for the doctrine of the rapture if such teachings are adopted.

(To Be Continued . . .)

The "Latter Rain" Revival Movement
Part VI
by Thomas Ice

This is my final installment on the “latter rain” revival movement. Thus, I will bring to an end my discussion on the Ephesians 5:25-27 passage and then call attention to the negative implications that this doctrine has upon pretribulationism and Bible prophecy in general.

KEY THEOLOGICAL CONCEPTS AND PASSAGES

A Perfect Church?

In my previous article, I demonstrated that restorationists teach that the church must reach a level of experiential perfection before the return of Christ is possible. They believe that Christ may not return until this is achieved. The means that they believe bring about this perfection is an end-time outpouring of the Holy Spirit, resulting in a “latter rain” revival. This revival will be the vehicle for perfecting the existing church and, in turn, lead to the quick conversion of millions to Christ. The key to the revival will be the unity of the church. Some of these beliefs are alleged to come from Ephesians 5:25-27. I will complete an examination of that passage.

In a nutshell, the Bible here describes the believer’s legal standing before God, as won on our behalf through Christ’s work on the cross. On the other hand, Restorationist (mis)apply this text as something which the believer and the Church must grow into and become in our current experience. I will now examine reasons why this passage should be interpreted positionally. First, verse 25 is grounding Paul’s admonition on the basis of Christ’s giving of Himself sacrificially on the cross. Within the context of this passage it is a clear reference of something that can only apply to the believer’s legal standing before God. Because Christ’s giving of Himself on behalf of Believers is a summary of His gracious provision to the church for her salvation.

Second, in verse 26, the passive participle “having cleansed,” speaks of action which occurs simultaneously with the action of the verb (gave), to which it is related to in verse 25. This means that the cleansing is related to Christ’s giving of Himself on the cross—a positional and not experiential sense. In other words, this is something that happens at justification (the moment one becomes a true Christian) and not at sanctification (the process of living the Christian life after initial faith in Christ).

Third, the vocabulary words used in this passage are terms that are employed throughout the Bible to describe positional salvation or justification, not the process of living the Christian life or sanctification. “Cleanse” refers to ceremonial washings within the Old Testament temple ritual that depict justification, not sanctification. This same Greek word is used to describe positional salvation (justification) in John 15:3 when Jesus said, “*You are already **clean** because of the word which I have spoken to you.*” “Washing of water with the word” is also a positional phrase descriptive of becoming a Christian, not being a Christian (cf. Titus 3:5).

Fourth, the terms in verse 27, having no “spot” or “wrinkle,” and that believers should be “holy” and “blameless,” in this context, like the previous terms, refers to a Believer’s legal standing earned by Christ in His death on the cross. They do not speak of a current process like sanctification, as would be required for the restorationist view to have merit. For

the restorationist interpretation to be possible, this part of the passage should have used language that speaks of sanctification, which it does not.

Fifth, when will these things be accomplished for the church? As Lenski says, “the words indicate the final perfection of holiness at the last day.”⁴¹ It is a future perfection to which Paul speaks. Commentator John Eadie concludes and summarizes, after examining the meaning of this passage from the original Greek text, the following:

Such, then, is to be the ultimate perfection and destiny of the church. . . . We have already said that the presentation is not contemporary with the consecration, but is posterior to it, and does not finally and formally take place on earth. The “church” we understand in its full significance, as the whole company of the redeemed, personified and represented as a spiritual Spouse. The presentation belongs therefore to the period of the second coming, . . . The church as it now is, and as it has always been, has many spots and wrinkles upon it. But perfection is secured by a process of continuous and successful operation, and shall be ultimately enjoyed.⁴²

This would mean that the body of Christ is being perfected when a new individual believes the Gospel and God applies the finished work of Christ to their account. When the last person believes, then the rapture will occur, because the Body of Christ will have been made complete. Up in heaven, the resurrected and glorified bride, who has made herself ready (Rev. 19:1-10), will be presented to Christ in experiential perfection at the marriage supper of the Lamb. The Church will not *experience* perfection before the resurrection, even though legally she is made perfect by the work of Christ. This experience of perfection, up in heaven, will take place during the same time that the supposed “latter rain” outpouring of the Holy Spirit is said to fall upon the Church.

THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

For those following this series, you should be able to see by now that terms like “latter rain” and “Joel’s army” from Joel 2 do not in any way, shape, or form refer to the Church. Instead they refer to God’s program for Israel. Thus, it cannot refer in any way to the church. In fact, one of the purposes of the tribulation will be that God will purge out the rebels (unbelieving Israel) from the remnant (Ezek. 20:38) so that “all Israel will be saved” (Rom. 11:26) by the time of Christ’s second coming. These passages, taken in their contexts, refer to God’s program for Israel and not the Church.

Such misinterpretation leads to ram, cram, and jamming God’s plan for Israel into the Church. This causes those who do such things to not only distort God’s plan for Israel during the tribulation, but to also miss the focus for the Church, which is Christ’s any-moment return at the rapture. It is not surprising that as more Evangelicals focus upon a revival theology, that their gaze is taken away from the Blessed Hope (Titus 3:5). John teaches that it is just such a hope “fixed on Him [that] purifies himself, just as He [Jesus] is pure” (1 John 3:3b).

Since the Church will be taken out before the tribulation of Daniel’s 70th week begins (the pretrib rapture), which I believe, then one cannot believe in a theology of restoration and latter rain. The pretrib position teaches that the Church is raptured, not restored. Other views of the rapture (partial, midtrib, pre-wrath, and posttrib), all mix God’s program for Israel and the Church into the tribulation, thus allowing for the possibility, but not the necessity, of some form of latter rain/restoration teachings. This is one of the main reasons why so many Charismatic leaders appear to increasingly pepper their sermons with anti-rapture statements. They realize that one cannot be looking both for a great “latter rain” revival and an any-moment return of Christ at the rapture. If a revival is necessary, then there is something that has to happen before Christ could return, and the rapture would have to wait until after this has convened.

I have meet people who say that they believe in both an any-moment rapture and the necessity of an end-time revival. This is logically impossible as noted above. If any thing has to happen before the rapture, then it is logically impossible that the rapture is imminent. Yet, even after asking those who hold this position for an explanation that would resolve this clear conflict, they cannot verbalize one. They are usually quick to tell me that God can to things that appear impossible to us and continue believing two contradictory views. The impossible things that God does in history do not relate to resolving contradictions, but refers to Him accomplishing things that a finite, fallen human being lacks the ability to perform. God never has or will accomplish things that contradict His Word. Instead, He performs His will in His own time in His way. So this is not an instance of a both/and, but of an either/or. Either the pretrib rapture is true or it is not. Or, either an end-time “latter rain” revival is true or it is not. Fish or cut bait, but you cannot do both.

Many have been exposed to bits and pieces of “latter rain” revival teachings through a whole host of vehicles. For example, the Vineyard churches (founded by the late John Wimber) have been advocating a “latter rain” revival teachings since at least February 1989 when Paul Cain taught these things at their annual conference in Anaheim, California. The “latter rain” revival doctrines have been disseminated to many others through Vineyard influenced events such as “The Praise March,” or “The March for Jesus,” and the well-know and well-attended “Promise Keepers.” The end-time “latter rain” revival doctrines are being disseminated through music on the radio and at various Christian events. These teachings are quite evident on Christian radio and television. Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN) has an over abundance of “latter rain” revival advocates, although they rarely call it that. They primarily just speak of the coming revival and sometimes bash belief in the rapture. There are dozens of books, the last ten years, that advocate similar themes.

An increasing number of Evangelical leaders and participants in these events are adopting “latter rain” revival ideas, some in bits and pieces rather than the whole cloth. Some are adopting pieces such as belief in an end-time revival and the requirement of experiential unity in order to effect such a revival. Such views are increasingly widespread and undermine the biblical teaching of pretribulationism.

CONCLUSIONS

I believe that one of the major reasons why a significant segment of Evangelicals are moving away from pretribulationism is due to the increasing popularity of “latter rain” revival teachings. To buy into such categories naturally causes an antagonism to pretribulationism and its accompanying doctrines. I believe that many Evangelicals have been exposed to the teachings of both pretribulationism and “latter rain” revival teachings and have not reached the point of sorting out the differences so that they may come down on one side or the other. The purpose of this series is to explain the rise and development of these teachings so that anyone, pro or con, might see them as a whole and not just absorb bits and pieces from one and wonder why their theology on these matters seem confused. I want to clarify positions so that Believers can make an informed choice. Hopefully, falling on the side of biblical truth and the pretrib rapture.

As I noted in earlier articles, the New Testament does not say even one word about a revival for the church at any time let alone about an end-time “latter rain” revival. I also noted that God is free to sovereignly send a revival at any time He pleases, but that there are no formulas or conditions in the New Testament that will bring His blessing. The New Testament does warn in dozens of passages about the threat of apostate doctrine and behavior that Believers are to beware of. Finally, the New Testament does teach Believers “to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come” (1 Thess. 1:10). Jesus Himself is our hope. The hope, like a betrothed bride, who longs to see and be with her groom because she loves him (and though you have **not seen** Him, you love Him, 1 Pet. 1:8). Maranatha!

ENDNOTES

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- ¹ Eerdmans' *Handbook To Christianity In America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), p. 201.
- ² *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), p. 470.
- ³ *Handbook*: p. 332.
- ⁴ *Handbook*: p. 333.
- ⁵ Donald Dayton, *Theological Roots of Pentecostalism*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), p. 88.
- ⁶ *Dictionary*, p. 660.
- ⁷ Dayton, *Roots*, p. 27.
- ⁸ Dayton, *Roots*, pp. 22-23.
- ⁹ Dayton, *Roots*, p. 27.
- ¹⁰ *Dictionary*, p. 632.
- ¹¹ Cited by Dayton, *Roots*, p. 27.
- ¹² Dayton, *Roots*, p. 27.
- ¹³ Dayton, *Roots*, p. 33.
- ¹⁴ *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), p. 532.
- ¹⁵ Robert Crabtree, "New Wave Theology," (privately printed paper, 1987), pp. 19-20.
- ¹⁶ *Dictionary*, p. 534.
- ¹⁷ Bill Hamon, "God's Wave of Restoration for the 1980's," *Thy Kingdom Come*, Aug., 1987, p. 11.
- ¹⁸ "Vision of the Eagle's Nest Christian Fellowship," in *Tape and Book Catalog*, July, 1990, p. 6.
- ¹⁹ Rick Joyner, *Mobilizing the Army of God* (Springdale PA: Whitaker House), p. 143-44.
- ²⁰ Huibert Zegwaart, "Apocalyptic Eschatology and Pentecostalism: The Relevance of John's Millennium for Today," *Pneuma* (Vol. 10, No. 1; Spring 1988), p. 4.
- ²¹ Donald Dayton cited in Zegwaart, "Apocalyptic Eschatology," p. 4.
- ²² Dick Iverson, *Present Day Truths*, (Portland: Bible Temple Publishing, 1975), p. 52.
- ²³ An example of this can be found in Nate Krupp's book *The Church Triumphant: At the End of the Age* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image Publishers, 1988), pp. 227-29.
- ²⁴ Iverson, *Present Day Truths*, p. 53.
- ²⁵ Earl Paulk, *Held In The Heavens Until . . . God's Strategy For Planet Earth* (Atlanta: K Dimension Publishers, 1985),.
- ²⁶ Rick Godwin, "The True Seed of Abraham" Cassette recording, Eagle's Nest Christian Center, San Antonio, TX, Tape GO32788.
- ²⁷ Charles Ryrie, *Dispensationalism* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), p. 137.
- ²⁸ Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, p. 138.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*
- ³⁰ S. Lewis Johnson, "Paul and 'The Israel of God': A Case-Study" in Stanley D. Toussaint & Charles H. Dyer, *Essays in Honor of J. Dwight Pentecost*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1996), p. 195
- ³¹ Rick Godwin, "Vision of the Eagle's Nest Christian Fellowship," in *Tape and Book Catalog*, July, 1990, p. 6.
- ³² This information was taken from A. Glen Campbell, "The Problem of Apostasy In The Greek New Testament," Th.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1957, pp. 9, 16, 20, 23.
- ³³ *Pre-Trib Perspectives*, Vol. V, Num. 4; July 2000, pp. 5-7.
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 6.
- ³⁵ Rick Joyner, *The Harvest* (Pineville, NC: Morningstar Publications, 1989), p. 7.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, back cover matter.
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 28-29.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 31.
- ³⁹ Eagle's Nest Christian Fellowship of San Antonio, Texas, *Tape and Book Catalog*, July, 1990, page 8
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 6.
- ⁴¹ R. C. H. Lenski, *Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians* (Columbus, OH: The Wartburg Press, 1946), p. 637.
- ⁴² John Eadie, *Commentary on The Epistle to The Ephesians*, (Minneapolis: James and Klock Christian Publishing Co., 1977 reprint, 1883 original publication), pp. 422-23.