

The Book of James

Getting Ready for the Harvest

Lesson #11 for December 13, 2014

Scriptures: James 5:7-12; Romans 13:11; 1 Corinthians 3:13; Luke 7:39-50; Colossians 4:6.

1. This lesson will focus on James 5:7-12 and how we should get ready for the outpouring of the latter rain. We do not know when Jesus will return. (Matthew 24:36) As in James 5:7-8, the New Testament speaks repeatedly about the *parousia*, the “coming” and “presence” of Jesus. So, what are we to be doing as we are waiting for the latter rain? James tells us that we are to wait patiently and endure. How does that compare with the parable of the ten virgins who were sleeping? (Matthew 25:1-13) Are we waiting patiently? Or, are we sleeping?
2. The major example that James gave as an illustration is the story of the farmer who planted seed and then must wait for the early rain and the latter rain to ripen the harvest. In Palestine the early rains came in October or November, and the latter rains came in March or April. These rains are mentioned repeatedly in Scripture. (See James 5:7; Deuteronomy 11:14; Jeremiah 5:24; 14:22; and Joel 2:23. Compare Hosea 6:1-3; Joel 2:28-29; and **Habakkuk 3:17-18.**)

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, *Acts of the Apostles* 54.2-55.1; *AG* 220.2; *OFC* 212.3; *FLB* 333.3; *Mar* 256.2; *YRP* 317.2-3. [Bold type and italics are added.]

3. But, as we wait for the harvest, we must remember that it is impossible to distinguish between the tares and the wheat until the harvest time. (Matthew 13:24-30)
4. How can we be sure that we are among the wheat and not among the tares? We must not be judgmental of people because we cannot tell what is happening or what will happen to them in the future.
5. James 5:8 suggests that Christ’s coming is near or perhaps even at hand. Two thousand years later, we are still waiting. How could that be near?

The angels of God in their messages to men represent time as very short. Thus it has always been presented to me. It is true that time has continued longer than we expected in the early days of this message. Our Saviour did not appear as soon as we hoped. But has the Word of the Lord failed? Never! It should be remembered that the promises and the threatenings of God are alike conditional.—Ellen G. White, *Manuscript 4*, 1883; *Ev* 695.1.

6. Read Matthew 4:17; 10:7; and 24:33. Matthew is the only Gospel writer who talked about the kingdom of heaven. But, careful reading of these verses teaches us that there are two parts to that kingdom: A present spiritual reality, and a glorious future reality. All the New Testament writers looked forward to the imminent coming of Jesus. But, they never told us

exactly when that will be. It is not that they did not want to know. See Acts 1:6-7. But, what would happen if God had told us the exact date when He will come? Wouldn't a lot of people put off getting ready until the last minute? Perhaps, even too late? Do we have anything to do in preparation for that day? Don't we need to prepare ourselves as well as others? (2 Peter 3:10-12) We need to become settled into the truth (2 Peter 1:12) both intellectually and spiritually while avoiding temptation, enduring trials, and suffering for our faith. (Acts 14:22) Are any of us suffering for our faith? Won't that happen to the whole church in the end?

Just as soon as the people of God are sealed in their foreheads—it is not any seal or mark that can be seen, but **a settling into the truth, both intellectually and spiritually, so they cannot be moved—just as soon as God's people are sealed and prepared for the shaking, it will come.** Indeed, it has begun already; the judgments of God are now upon the land, to give us warning, that we may know what is coming.—Ellen G. White, *MS 173*, 1902; *S.D.A. Bible Commentary* Vol. 4, p. 1161.6; *LDE* 219.4; *Maranatha* 200.2; *FLB* 287.7; *OFC* 83.6; *1MR* 249.2-250.0; *10MR* 252.1. [Bold type is added.]

7. We are to become stones for the building of God's spiritual temple. (1 Corinthians 3:11-12) Such stones need to be hewed and shaped to fit perfectly in their assigned location. Paul went on to describe so-called believers who are nothing more than wood, hay, or straw. (1 Corinthians 3:12-15) We certainly would not want to be among that group.

8. We are now living more than 170 years after the Great Disappointment in 1844. Did God intend for this very long delay to take place? The children of Israel only had to wander in the wilderness for 40 years before entering Canaan. The history of ancient Israel makes it very clear that the biggest dangers to God's people are not from the outside but from inside.

We have far more to fear from within than from without. . . . The unbelief indulged, the doubts expressed, the darkness cherished, encourage the presence of evil angels, and open the way for the accomplishment of Satan's devices.—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, March 22, 1887 par. 4; *1SM* 122.3; *LDE* 156.2.

9. Do we sometimes complain and grumble about what is happening in the church? If we see problems in the church, are we doing anything about them? Are we ever authorized to withhold our tithe? Or, avoid going to church? In his book James spoke about various problems within the church such as favoritism, evil surmising, evil speaking towards one another, envy, quarrels, and especially worldliness. If those problems existed in James's day, what about our day? **Could you make a list of the major problems in the Seventh-day Adventist Church today?** What would be on your list? What could we do about those problems? James suggested that some of the solutions include faith, "the implanted word," beholding the law of liberty, single-mindedness in godly wisdom, grace, clean hands and a pure heart, outward expressions of God's inward workings, visiting the afflicted and forgotten, and sowing peace rather than discord. Are we exercising any of those characteristics? What do you think of his suggestions?

10. Read James 5:10-11. James talked about the patience of Job and the prophets of the Old Testament. Of course, Job is the quintessential example of patience and faithfulness under trial and attack both physically and spiritually. What was Job's major trial? Was it his physical illness? Or, was it the spiritual attacks from his so-called friends? Where did those spiritual attacks come from? See Job 4:13-19, *GNB*. Satan himself was responsible. This, of course, is supported by Job 1 & 2.

11. Think about the examples of Daniel being thrown into the den of lions (Daniel 6); Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fire (Daniel 3); and Elijah and Elisha whose lives were threatened repeatedly (2 Kings 1). Jeremiah (Jeremiah 33) and Hanani (2 Chronicles 16) were put in prison, Zechariah the son of Jehoiada was stoned (2 Chronicles 24:21-22), and Isaiah was sawn in half (Hebrews 11:37). Are we facing any of those kinds of problems? Are we experiencing or exhibiting patience and endurance in whatever problems we might face? Are we praying for the right things? Are we praying for more opportunities to witness for the truth? If we did, would we need more patience and endurance? (Read 2 Timothy 3:12-13.)
12. Read James 5:12. This verse is a bit of a puzzlement for scholars. It is very clear that in everything we do, we are to be as transparent as the sunlight. How often do we in subtle ways act deceitfully? Is it wrong even to say, "I feel fine" if someone asks us how we feel in the morning when, in fact, we are feeling terrible?

Everything that Christians do should be as transparent as the sunlight. Truth is of God; deception, in every one of its myriad forms, is of Satan.—Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, pp. 66.2, 68.3. (Compare *PK* 252.3; *RC* 71.2,5; *SD* 64.5.)

13. Read Ephesians 4:15,29 and Colossians 4:6. Are we growing into the truth? Are our words and actions always helpful in building up not only ourselves but also those around us?
14. Consider these words from Ellen White as she discussed the case of Elijah.

To wait patiently, to trust when everything looks dark, is the lesson that the leaders in God's work need to learn. Heaven will not fail them in their day of adversity. **Nothing is apparently more helpless, yet really more invincible, than the soul that feels its nothingness and relies wholly on God....**

Trials will come, but go forward. This will strengthen your faith and fit you for service. The records of sacred history are written, not merely that we may read and wonder, but that the same faith which wrought in God's servants of old may work in us.—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 174.3-175.2.

Multitude have a wrong conception of God and His attributes, and are as truly serving a false god as were the worshipers of Baal. —Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings* 177.1 [Bold type is added.]

15. Do we really know how to rely "wholly on God"? Is our "conception of God and His attributes" correct? Is a true picture of God really a major issue in our church today?
16. In all of this patience and endurance that we are supposed to exhibit, when do we reach the place where we need to exercise church discipline? At what point do we need to speak out against false doctrine, immoral behavior, divisive teachings, etc. in the church?
17. The New Testament tells us many things about how to get ready for the second coming. How does the watchful waiting mentioned by James fit with Matthew 24:14 and our understanding of the latter rain? Is that a time of watching and waiting? Or, a time of busy activity, spreading the truth? Is there a time when we should be speaking out against the evils we see in the world? Or, in the church?
18. Few of us would question or doubt that God will make everything right in the end. But, how does that help us now? Will the time come when some of us will be tested like Job? Ezekiel was told just to be quiet about it when his wife died! (Ezekiel 24:15-19) Hosea was told to marry an adulterous wife. (Hosea 1 & 2) And what if our conditions were as bad as Habakkuk's as described in Habakkuk 3:17-18?

19. What should we learn about patience and endurance from the example of farmers? They certainly wait expectantly, sometimes patiently, praying for rain. Is that what we are supposed to do from a spiritual perspective? Is patience a dying art? How will we know when the time has come for us to put in the sickle to reap the harvest? Or, is that God's job?
20. It is not our responsibility to look around us to judge how others are doing. Our responsibility is to look at our own "field"—that is, those around us—to whom we might be able to witness. Meanwhile, of course, we should be praying for the latter rain. (See Zechariah 10:1 and compare Acts 2:1-3.) Do you think you will be able to identify the time when the latter rain begins to be poured out? We certainly would not want to miss it, would we?
21. We should remember, of course, that planting happens at the beginning of the whole process; harvesting takes place at the end. These points are obvious. But, sometimes, the long wait between those events seems interminable. When it comes to spiritual matters, Jesus Himself said that some might be planting and others harvesting, even side-by-side in time. How much seed planting and harvesting are we doing? Could we be doing more? Does seed planting and harvesting involve only bringing outsiders into the Seventh-day Adventist Church? Or, is there additional seed planting needed to help grow the faith and the experience of those who are already in the church?
22. What are we supposed to do about injustice being done in the world around us? Are we supposed to patiently wait and endure and keep quiet about it? Is there ever a time for us to rise up and do something about injustice? Are we as Christians being persecuted? Perhaps in some countries but certainly not in many. Why not? Remember 2 Timothy 3:12 which says, "Everyone who wants to live a godly life in union with Christ Jesus will be persecuted."
23. We are hoping one day to live in a perfect society where everything will be loving and caring and there will never be trials. So, why do we need persecution to prepare us for that? **Does persecution reveal the truth about our characters?** In fact, could it perhaps identify which side we are on: the side of Christ or the side of Satan? What does it say about a Christian if he waits patiently in the face of persecution, financial loss, social ostracism, or even the threat of death without any hope of earthly gain? Surely, we believe that the time for the second coming is near. It is not a time for looking around inside the church and criticizing others. How much is included in enduring patiently? Does that include vigorously witnessing?

In the absence of persecution, there have drifted into our ranks some who appear sound, and their Christianity unquestionable, but who, if persecution should arise, would go out from us. In the crisis, they would see force in specious reasoning that has had an influence on their minds. Satan has prepared various snares to meet varied minds. When the law of God is made void the church will be sifted by fiery trials, and a larger proportion than we now anticipate, will give heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils. Instead of being strengthened when brought into strait places, many prove that they are not living branches of the True Vine....—Ellen White, *General Conference Daily Bulletin*, April 13, 1891 par 11; *Maranatha* 28.3; 2SM 368.1.

24. As suggested by all of Scripture, are we enduring patiently and preparing for the final outpouring of the latter rain? Will we stand straight and tall, ready to give an answer to anyone who asks us the reasons for our faith? (1 Peter 3:15)

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