

The Hebrew Corner

If you are experiencing rainy weather these days, the following will be relevant to you. The Tanach contains many references to rain and its importance in the land of Israel, for example, the following passage (Deuteronomy 11:11):

“But the land, whither ye go to possess it, is a land of hills and valleys, and drinketh water of the rain of heaven:”

The word for rain in Hebrew, used in the above passage, is *matar* (מָטָר, mah-TAHR). Being a region that depended heavily on agriculture, rain was essential for production of food, and there were particular times of the year when rain was needed the most, as this passage from Jeremiah indicates (Jeremiah 5:24):

“Neither say they in their heart, Let us now fear the LORD our God, that giveth rain, both the former and the latter, in his season: he reserveth unto us the appointed weeks of the harvest.”

The Hebrew word translated as former rain, is *yoreh* (יָרָה, yoh-REH), and the word translated as latter rain is *malqosh* (מַלְקוֹשׁ, mahl-KOHS). In the Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible commentary, it is indicated that the former rain, an autumn rain, was necessary to soften the earth that had been hardened by the dry months of summer. The Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary adds that the former rain helped to “fructify” seed, or make the seed more productive. The latter rain, coming in March, was needed to promote full ears of grain, and thus secure the harvest, as noted in

Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible. This passage from Deuteronomy demonstrates that receiving the blessings of God, such as rain in due season, was tied closely to the worship, obedience to, and love of God that the people of Israel exhibited (Deuteronomy 11:13-17):

“And it shall come to pass, if ye shall hearken diligently unto my commandments which I command you this day, to love the LORD your God, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul, That I will give you the rain of your land in his due season, the first rain and the latter rain, that thou mayest gather in thy corn, and thy wine, and thine oil. And I will send grass in thy fields for thy cattle, that thou mayest eat and be full. Take heed to yourselves, that your heart be not deceived, and ye turn aside, and serve other gods, and worship them; And then the LORD's wrath be kindled against you, and he shut up the heaven, that there be no rain, and that the land yield not her fruit; and lest ye perish quickly from off the good land which the LORD giveth you.”

The result of the second course of action outlined above was vividly demonstrated when God gave the power to Elijah to withhold rain from the northern kingdom of Israel (Samaria). This kingdom was known for turning aside from God and worshipping idols. Here is the relevant passage (1 Kings 17:1):

“And Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, as the LORD God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word.”

King Ahab had provoked the Lord exceedingly by making a house for

Baal, and placing an altar within it, and making a grove, which is a pagan shrine. Thus God's judgment came upon Samaria, and no rain fell for 3 years and 6 months, resulting in a famine in the land (see Luke 4:25).

The B'rit Hadashah also refers to the former and latter rains, with the following prophetic passage (James 5:7-8):

“Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and the latter rain. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.”

Along the same lines, but with added specificity, is a passage from Hosea from which there is a clear Messianic prophecy referring the former and latter rains symbolically (Hosea 6:1-3):

“Come, and let us return unto the LORD: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up. After two days will he revive us: in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight. Then we shall know, if we follow on to know the LORD: his going forth is prepared as the morning; and he shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth.”

A lot is being said and implied in this passage. The Lord is coming to this land (Israel). He also will come as the latter and former rain. He will revive the people of Israel after two days; he will raise them them up in the third day. Many questions come to mind:

1. Do the former and latter rains symbolize the first and second comings of Yeshua, or do they indicate only that he will descend like the rain upon Israel.
2. Some commentators think that he came the first time in autumn (former rain). Will he come the next time in late winter or early spring (latter rain).
3. Do the two days represent two actual days, perhaps the time in which Yeshua along with his followers defeat his enemies at his second coming? Or do these days represent two days in the sight of the Lord, or two thousand years (Psalm 90:4). If so, does this mean that there will be about a 2000 year time lapse between the first and second comings of Yeshua (the former and latter rains).

This is food for consideration, but it is clear that God is not going to consult any of us as to when he will send Yeshua back. The following passage indicates the difficulty, and the intrigue of studying the word of God for ultimate truths (Isaiah 45:15):

“Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour.”

May we study the word of God with diligence, being aware that our knowledge now is only in part, but we are going to see the truth clearly in time. Thank you Lord for your word, and blessings and shalom to all!