



PREPARING TO STAND

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“In this age, just prior to the second coming of Christ in the clouds of heaven, God calls for men who will prepare a people to stand in the great day of the Lord.” SW 3-21-05

SHOULD WE DO ANYTHING TO PHYSICALLY PREPARE FOR THE TIME OF TROUBLE?

—Some Thoughts on Matthew 24:17-18, and Early Writing page 56

by Jim Buller

Many of us who conscientiously desire to do God's will, have had serious questions about whether or not we should do anything to physically prepare for the end-times. These questions center mainly around what Jesus said in Matthew 24:17-18, and the things God told Ellen White to write found primarily on page 56 of *Early Writing*. [There is also a similar quotation on Maranatha page 181.] In this study, we will take a look at both of these passages, comparing them with other scriptures and quotations from Ellen White to see what we can learn. We will begin with the quotation from *Early Writings*, which says:

The Lord has shown me repeatedly that it is contrary to the Bible to make any provision for our temporal wants in the time of trouble. I saw that if the saints had food laid up by them or in the field in the time of trouble, when sword, famine, and pestilence are in the land, it would be taken from them by violent hands and strangers would reap their fields. Then will be the time for us to trust wholly in God, and He will sustain us. I saw that our bread and water will be sure at that time, and that we shall not lack or suffer hunger; for God is able to spread a table for us in the wilderness. If necessary He would send ravens to feed us, as He did to feed Elijah, or rain manna from heaven, as He did for the Israelites.

Because the first sentence here says, “The Lord has shown me repeatedly that it is contrary to the Bible to make *any* provision for our temporal wants in the time of trouble,” some would have us believe that we should not do anything in a physical sense to prepare for the end-times. It has even been alleged that making preparation shows a *lack* of faith, because this would not be trusting “wholly” in God.

So, if you want an excuse not to prepare, apparently here you have it. But, is it ever safe to build a case on just one verse from the Bible, or just one sentence from Ellen White's writings? —of course not. Therefore we need to study into this a little deeper.

To begin with, let's recognize that the real issue here, is trusting "wholly" in God. Is our "trust" in the supplies we have stocked up, or some skills we have learned, or the equipment we have prepared? Or is our trust in *God*? Let's illustrate this issue with a couple of stories.

Once, I heard about a missionary family who was stationed someplace way back in the bush. The husband had to be away for a while, leaving his wife and children at the mission station. While he was gone, a poisonous snake came into their house. The wife, who was not that familiar with firearms, got the gun her husband had left with her, and in the excitement, somehow managed to load it. She pointed the gun at the snake and prayed, "Lord, You aim, I'll pull the trigger" —and shot the snake right in the head! Was she trusting wholly in God —obviously! But, is it necessary to lack skills, or have bare shelves and empty pockets, in order to be trusting *wholly* in God? Some would have us think so —that we must be in a position where we have literally nothing to truly be trusting *completely* in God. But, let us look at another story.

In 1 Samuel 17 we find the familiar account of David and Goliath. Let's take a look at some of the details we usually skip over. Was David skilled with the sling? —Yes! In fact the Israelites about that time were known for their accuracy with a sling. (See Judges 20:16 for an example!) Notice also what David tells King Saul about a couple of experiences he has *already* had going up against enemies that were larger and stronger than he was. "Your servant has killed both lion and bear; and this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them." (Verse 36.) Notice also that David takes not only his sling, but also his staff when he goes out to fight Goliath. (See verse 40.) This gives him both a long-range weapon *and* a short-range weapon. He also picked up five smooth stones as he crosses the brook. David had the skills, the experience, the confidence, and the tools to do the job!

Does this mean that he went in his own strength, and that he wasn't trusting *wholly* in God? —No! Remember what David tells Goliath as he comes on to the field of battle. "You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin. But I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts." (Verse 45.) *Goliath* was the one coming in his own strength and ability. David recognized that "the battle is the Lord's," (see verse 47), and that the previous experiences God's providence had provided him with had prepared him for this very day.

Upon closer examination, we find the difference between David and Goliath is essentially the same as the difference between the wise and foolish girls in the Parable of the Ten Virgins. (See Matthew 25:1-13). Like the wise girls, David realized that *what he had* was not enough to guarantee success —he needed "extra oil." He needed, and therefore relied on, "extra" help from God. But, like the foolish girls, (*and* the Laodiceans for that matter, who, although they have some major issues, don't sense their need, [see Revelation 3:17]), Goliath *thought he had enough*. This brings to mind the old memory verse from Proverbs 3:5-6, which says, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, do not lean on your own understanding, in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will direct your paths." Here we are counseled to trust wholly in God rather than

relying on our own abilities. This trust / faith will lead us to ‘check in’ with Him in everything we do, to make sure we continually have “extra” help from Him.

Thus, trusting wholly in God is not so much about what skill, equipment, or abilities we may, or may not, have. It is about whether we humbly realize that *whatever we may have, it is not enough*. This will lead us to recognize our need, and *rely* on extra help from God. Therefore, it is *not necessary* to have empty pockets, bare shelves, and inadequate skills to be trusting *wholly* in God.

Another excellent example illustrating this same point is Noah building the ark. Was Noah trying to save himself by building it? Was he depending on his own skills and abilities? —No. Hebrews 11:7 says it was “by *faith*” that Noah “prepared” the ark. Which brings us to another key thought in this whole issue —that faith and works *go together*. See James 2:17-18. There is an interesting quotation about Noah on page 95 of *Patriarchs and Prophets* which says, “All that man could do was done to render the work perfect” —think about it, *perfect* workmanship!— “Yet the ark could not of itself have withstood the storm which was to come upon the earth. *God alone* could preserve His servants upon the tempestuous waters.” (Emphasis supplied.) Even though Noah did *perfect* work, and investing in the ark “all that he possessed,” (*The Signs of the Times*, February 27, 1879), he still trusted *wholly* in God!

Unfortunately, we have gotten the idea that if something is “wholly” God’s doing then we can not do *any* part of it. Our “enmity” —sinful human nature’s desire to keep a distance between us and God— is probably behind this. Enmity doesn’t want us to get together with God. (See “Preparing to Stand” #11 for a study on this important subject —available in the back issue archives on www.preparingtostand.org.) But the Bible says we are to be “labourers *together with* God.” (1 Corinthians 3:9, emphasis supplied.) If we connect with God the result will be united actions —“labor” together with Him. As was mentioned earlier our faith and works *go together*. This is the essence of Righteousness by Faith —doing the right thing as a result of our faith. Notice also what the following quotation from *Patriarchs and Prophets*, page 290, (emphasis supplied), says on this subject.

God in His providence brought the Hebrews into the mountain fastnesses before the sea, that He might manifest His power in their deliverance and signally humble the pride of their oppressors. He might have saved them in any other way, but He chose this method in order to test their faith and strengthen their trust in Him. The people were weary and terrified, yet if they had held back when Moses bade them advance, God would never have opened the path for them. It was “by faith” that “they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land.” Hebrews 11:29. In marching down to the very water, they showed that they believed the word of God as spoken by Moses. *They did all that was in their power to do*, and then the Mighty One of Israel divided the sea to make a path for their feet. [Emphasis supplied.]

God wanted to strengthen the Israelite’s trust in Him yet He expected them to do “*all that was in their power to do!*” Here we find a common tread. The missionary wife, David, Noah, and the Hebrews at the Red Sea all *acted in faith*. They all *worked together with God* by both trusting “wholly” in Him, AND doing *all that was in their power to do*.

Another reason we have problems with this concept is because of our way of thinking. Human reasoning tells us that if *we do something*, it means we must be relying at *least in part* on our own ability, and therefore it can not be *complete* reliance on God. Thus we conclude that if we would do “all that [is] in [our] power to do,” we must not be trusting *wholly* in Him. But, God isn't limited to our way of thinking. “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts.” (Isaiah 55:9.) We need to learn to look at things God's way, and as mentioned earlier, not to rely on our own understanding. (See Proverbs 3:5-6.) Thus, based on what we've studied so far, to be trusting “wholly” in God and truly acting “by faith,” we must *also* be doing all that is in our power to do —realizing that our best efforts will not be enough, and that we continually need extra help from God.

Let us go back now and focus on the word “provision,” in the *Early Writings*, page 56 quotation. It says, “The Lord has shown me repeatedly that it is contrary to the Bible to make any *provision* for our temporal wants in the time of trouble.” It is interesting and helpful to compare this with the same word in another quotation which contains counsel for the end-times that is found on pages 9-10 of *Country Living*. It says, “Again and again the Lord has instructed that our people are to take their families away from the cities, into the country, where they can raise their own *provisions*; for in the future the problem of buying and selling will be a very serious one.” Just like God told Noah to build the ark, He *has* told us to get set up in “the country, where [we] can raise [our] own provisions.”

But, notice the other similarities between these two quotations besides the use of the word “provisions”: “the Lord” / “the Lord,” has “repeatedly” / “again and again,” “shown” / “instructed,” regarding making “provision” / “provisions.” Yet, apparently one quote is telling us not to make provisions while the other is telling us to do so —that we should even raise *our own* provisions! Is God being inconsistent here? —Not if we study this out a bit.

Part of the answer, lies in the term “the time of trouble.” Notice the way this term is used in another quotation from *Early Writings*, on pages 85-86.

On page 33 is given the following: ‘... At the commencement of the time of trouble, we were filled with the Holy Ghost as we went forth and proclaimed the Sabbath more fully.’

This view was given in 1847 ... ‘The commencement of that time of trouble,’ here mentioned does not refer to the time when the plagues shall begin to be poured out, but to a short period just before they are poured out, while Christ is in the sanctuary.

The original mention of, “the commencement of the time of trouble,” was on page 33, then, a clarification of this term is then given on pages 85-86. Notice also that the quotation we have been studying is on page 56, right in-between pages 33 and 85. Apparently there was a need to clarify the use of the term, “the time of trouble,” on pages 85-86 because the readers didn't understand what was meant when it was used on page 33.

Notice also from this quotation that there are two parts to the Time of Trouble. (See also 'Putting Together the End-Time Time-Line' in "Preparing to Stand" #25 —available in the back issue archives on www.preparingtostand.org.) The first part is between the National Sunday Law and the Close of Probation. The second part is after the Close of Probation, during the Seven Last Plagues. (Sometimes the first part is called the "Little" Time of Trouble, and the second part is called, the "Big," or "Great," Time of Trouble. The term "Jacob's Time of Trouble" also refers to the second part.)

Nowadays, when we say, "the Time of Trouble," we usually refer to the entire Time of Trouble —both parts. However, from the above quotation it seems that when Ellen White wrote, "the Time of Trouble," on page 33 of *Early Writings*, most of the people thought she was referring to the *second* part of the Time of Trouble. Therefore, on page 85-86, she needed to clarify, that "the commencement of the time of trouble," on page 33, was referring to the *first* part of the Time of Trouble —while Christ is still in the Sanctuary *before* probation closes, and before the Seven Last Plagues are poured out.

Since what is on page 33 was written in 1847, it is entirely possible that when she wrote this, *she herself* didn't completely understand the distinction between the two parts of the Time of Trouble. Remember, this was back in the early days of the church, and many of these details were still in the process of being discovered.

The reason the *Country Living* pages 9-10 quotation says we need to be set up in the country where we "can raise [our] own provisions," is because this is referring to the first part of the time of trouble during which we will not be able to buy or sell. (See also Revelation 13:17). The *Early Writings*, page 56, quotation on the other hand, is referring to the second part of the Time of Trouble, as we will see in a moment.

But first let's consider what is involved in raising our own provisions. Take potatoes for instance. After this year's potato crop is harvested, we won't have any more potatoes from our gardens until next year's crop matures. Therefore, if we want to have potatoes for the rest of the year, we will need to make a root cellar, or have some other way to store up enough potatoes to last until next year's crop comes out of the garden. If we don't, we will only have potatoes for a short period each year. Which would also mean that during the dead of winter, when there is *no* produce coming out of the garden, we would not have *anything* to eat. (Maybe that's why it's called the "dead of winter!") The truth of the matter is that we have been relying on other people to store up food for us so we can go to the market and buy things almost any time of year. But if we are not able to buy or sell, this will not be an option. Also, in the future, especially once the Time of Trouble starts, this system will most likely be severely disrupted by everything else that will be going, and there might not be any food in the store anyway!

Thus, an integral part of raising our own provisions involves storing up at least a year worth of what we have grown. In fact, if we are wise, we will try to store up more than a year's worth, just in case the crop next year isn't very plentiful, or in case God sends us extra mouths to feed, etc.. If we are not used to doing this, it may seem like a lot of potatoes, but it is not "laying up", (or stockpiling), in the sense that the term is used in the *Early Writings*, page 56 quotation. It is simply a common practice in an agriculturally based life-style —which is the way we will be living during the first part of the Time of Trouble. It is also worth noting that this type of lifestyle was much more familiar back in the mid-1800's when this statement was written, so there wasn't the

same confusion on the issue that we have now, as the people back then understood what she meant.

Because we will not be able to buy or sell during at least part of the first part of the Time of Trouble, we *will* need to be living in the country where we can raise our own provisions. However as the Time of Trouble progresses, shortly after Probation Closes and the Seven Last Plagues begin, a “Death Decree” will be issued, (see Revelation 13:15). Notice what *The Great Controversy*, page 626, says we will do in response.

As the decree issued by the various rulers of Christendom against commandment keepers shall withdraw the protection of government and abandon them to those who desire their destruction, the people of God will flee from the cities and villages and associate together in companies, dwelling in the most desolate and solitary places. Many will find refuge in the strongholds of the mountains.

In response to this Death Decree we will flee again to the deepest wilderness we can get to. Let’s go back now and notice also the “wilderness” context of the *Early Writings*, page 56 quotation we have been studying. It is especially evident in the last half of the paragraph which is quoted again below.

I saw that our bread and water will be sure at that time, and that we shall not lack or suffer hunger; for God is able to spread a table for us in the wilderness. If necessary He would send ravens to feed us, as He did to feed Elijah, or rain manna from heaven, as He did for the Israelites.

At the Death Decree we will leave it *all* behind —our country homes, *and* whatever potatoes might still be in the root cellar— and flee to the “*most* desolate and solitary places.” The only way to get into these rugged mountainous areas would be on foot, so we wouldn’t be able to carry enough potatoes to feed ourselves until Jesus came anyway. It is understandable then that we been told not to concern ourselves with stocking up provisions for that time, and we have been given promises that we may rely on God’s ability to feed us.

It is also worth noting, based on the quotation from *Early Writings*, page 56 which we have been studying, how God *is* planning to feed us while we are out in the wilderness. At first glance it may look like He is going to “send ravens” or “rain manna.” But, look at the first two words of that sentence. They say, “If necessary” —this is *back-up plan* language. So, if the ravens and manna are His back-up plan, what is His *main* plan? We find it in the previous sentence, which says, “God is able to *spread a table for us in the wilderness.*”

Since God has promised to spread a table for us, it may seem like all we have to do is to sit down and eat. However, we need to consider that there may be more to it, and look at another quotation that uses the same phrase. *The Ministry of Healing*, page 200, says, “The mountains and hills are changing; the earth is waxing old like a garment; but *the blessing of God*, which spreads for His people a table in the wilderness, *will never cease.*” What does, “will never cease” mean? —that it will always be there, Yes. But when did, “will never cease,” begin? —at least as far back as Noah

coming out of the Ark, (see Genesis 8:22), and probably even all the way back to the Garden of Eden. Are there any examples in scripture of people for whom God has “spread a table” in the wilderness? —Yes, there are a few. But what about the hunter-gather peoples who have “lived of the land” for thousands of years? Aren’t they also God’s children? And haven’t His blessings also spread a table in the wilderness for them?

Part of the problem is we have “lost” the hunter-gather’s skills. People nowadays go out into the wilderness and get into trouble because they don’t have these skills. We’ve heard their stories, and as a result most of us no longer believe that God *is* able to spread a table in the wilderness for *us*. Our need to “trust wholly in God” *is indeed* the main issue here.

Most of God’s people nowadays have spent so much time in the city, that when confronted with the need to “Escape to the mountains!” like Lot, their reaction is to beg for an alternative destination and exclaim, “Please, no! ... I cannot escape to the mountains, lest some evil overtake me and I die.” (See Genesis 19:15-19.) But, notice the following from the *Patriarchs and Prophets*, page 290 quotation that was mentioned earlier about the Israelites at the Red Sea, and what it says about this.

God in His providence brought the Hebrews into the mountain fastnesses before the sea, that He might manifest His power in their deliverance ... He might have saved them in any other way, but He chose this method in order to test their faith and strengthen their trust in Him.

God could also provide for us by a different method. But the sure word of prophecy tells us He has chosen to, “*spread a table for us* in the wilderness.” Evidently He wants to strengthen *our* trust in Him by personally providing for us from the things He has created. He also wants us to learn that, “He has means for the removal of every difficulty, that those who serve Him and respect the means He employs may be sustained.” (*Ministry of Healing*, page 482.)

So, as we read the following from *Steps to Christ*, page 123, lets consider “the means He employs” to “spread a table for us in the wilderness” Notice that this quotation is also about “the necessity of trusting in God,” and that these lessons are for us, as they have “come down to *our time* full of instruction and comfort.”

In His Sermon on the Mount, Christ taught His disciples precious lessons in regard to the necessity of trusting in God. These lessons were designed to encourage the children of God through all ages, and they have come down to our time full of instruction and comfort. The Saviour pointed His followers to the birds of the air as they warbled their carols of praise, unencumbered with thoughts of care, for “they sow not, neither do they reap.” And yet the great Father provides for their needs. The Saviour asks, “Are ye not much better than they?” Matthew 6:26. The great Provider for man and beast opens His hand and supplies all His creatures. The birds of the air are not beneath His notice. He does not drop the food into their bills, but He makes provision for their needs. They must gather the grains He has scattered for them. They must prepare the material for their little nests. They must feed their young. They go forth singing to their labor, for “your heavenly Father

feedeth them.” And “are ye not much better than they?” Are not you, as intelligent, spiritual worshipers, of more value than the birds of the air? Will not the Author of our being, the Preserver of our life, the One who formed us in His own divine image, provide for our necessities if we but trust in Him?

Here, Jesus points us to the birds as an example of how God provides for us. But notice that, “He does not drop the food into their bills!” “They must gather the grains He has scattered for them. They must prepare the material for their little nests.” Trusting wholly in God therefore *includes* gathering and preparing! Just like the native peoples had to do. Works *is* a part of faith! It’s just very important that, like Noah, our actions be according to the Word of God. (See James 2:14-26, and Romans 10:17.)

Thus, if we look at the whole paragraph, the quotation from *Early Writings*, page 56, rather than telling us not to physically prepare for the Time of Trouble, lets us know that if we would “respect the means He employs,” we should learn some plant identification and primitive wilderness living skills —as even the birds and animals have to learn skills to survive. Otherwise, whose fault would it be if we were to go hungry, or cold, or unsheltered when God “spreads a table for *us* in the wilderness.”

This brings us back to what Jesus said in Matthew 24:17-18. Right after the verse about fleeing to the mountains, He says, “Let him who is on the house-top not come down to take anything out of his house. And let him who is in the field not go back to get his cloak.” Is Jesus saying in these verses that when we flee, we should, “Drop everything and run?” Many think the answer is an obviously, “Yes.” But let’s look a little more closely at the actual wording Jesus used —and at their implications.

For the sake of simplicity, we will focus on verse 18, about the one, “who is in the field,” who is not to “go back to get his cloak.” In Jerusalem, during the first century A.D., their signal to flee was the Roman armies surrounding the city. (See Luke 21:20-21.) So suppose a Christian at that time, was out working in his field. As the day warmed up he took off his cloak and laid it aside. A little later, he hears some unusual noises, and looking up, sees the armies surrounding the city. According to these verses, would it have been OK for him to pick up his cloak, *if* he had laid it down where he could have easily grabbed it as he fled past? Or suppose it happened earlier in the day, and he still had his coat on. Would it have been OK to take it with him? —or should he have taken it off and left it behind?

Read the verses again if you need to, but Jesus did *not* say, “Drop everything and run!” What He said was, “*Don’t go back!*” This is a significant difference! For if we are supposed to ‘drop everything and run,’ then we should leave the “cloak” and everything else behind. The implication here is that there would be no point in preparing, as we wouldn’t be able to bring anything anyway. But, if we are just not suppose to ‘go back,’ it would be OK to take things, and therefore it *is* worth it to make preparations.

Interestingly, we again find this same message in the Parable of the Ten Virgins. The foolish girls were left out of the wedding because they had to “*go back.*” But the wise girls had prepared, and when the crisis came, they already had extra oil *with* them!

In addition to the instruction in the verses above, Jesus also said to, “Watch” and “Be Ready.” (See Matthew 24:43-44.) So, let’s picture a *faithful* Christian family in

Jerusalem a few months before the armies surrounded the city. They have been *watching*, so they notice when the Jews revolted against the Romans in the spring of AD 66. From this they know that now it will only be a short of time until the armies come to put down the revolt! —soon, it would be time to flee!

They gather together pray for wisdom, and do some serious planning about what they should do and where they might go. Then they start making preparations, for they knows that if they wait until the last minute they may have to leave without anything. As they continues to pray and prepare, they are reminded of their ancestors at the first Passover, all packed up, with their shoes on their feet, their staff in their hand, —just waiting for the signal to go. Here they have an example of *being ready!*

As they puts their packs together, they keeps things simple because “fleeing” means moving fast and traveling light. So they includes only basic item which cover the essentials. They keeps their packs beside the door of their home, so they can easily grab them on their way out. When they go somewhere they take them along, so that they will have their packs *with* them. While they’re working in their field, they place the packs where they can easily pick them up as they runs past. Sure, they get laughed at, but this gives them an opportunity to witness and to warn others. Maybe, instead of waiting till the last minute, they even leaves before the armies come.

Does this mean they is not trusting “wholly” in God —No. By faith they are obeying and relying on Jesus’ instructions. Shouldn’t we be just as faithful in our preparations?

The evening after the armies surrounded Jerusalem, we see two types of Christians, each making their camp for the night. Who was better off? The ones who had their packs, or the ones who hadn’t been watching, weren’t ready, and possibly even had to leave their coats behind?