



# 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 3-21-1905

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## **There May Be No Apparent Reason to Flee —A Lesson from History**

by Jim Buller

As the disciples were admiring the Temple, Jesus predicted that, “the time will come when not one stone will be left on another.” Filled with curiosity, they ask, “when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are about to take place?” Luke 21:6-7. This begins what is known as the “Olivet Discourse,” recorded in chapters: 24 and 25 of Matthew, Mark 13, and Luke 21.

Jesus answers his disciple’s questions by giving a parallel prophecy that applies to both the destruction of the Temple along with the city of Jerusalem in the first century A.D., and the end-times. (See *The Desire of Ages* page 628.) Thus, if we study the events connected with the destruction of Jerusalem, we should be able to learn a lot about what will happen to us in the end-times.

The sign Jesus gave His disciples, so they might know when “these things” were “about to take place,” was “Jerusalem being surrounded by armies.” Upon seeing this sign, they were to “flee to the mountains.” See Luke 21:7, 20-21. This sign has its parallel in the “abomination that causes desolation” of Matthew 24:15-16, where Jesus says, “Therefore when you see the ‘abomination of desolation,’ ... flee to the mountains.

This sign has a definite end-time application. In *Testimonies for the Church Volume Five*, pages 464-465, Ellen White tells us, “As the siege of Jerusalem by the Roman armies was the signal for flight to the Judean Christians, so the assumption of power on the part of our nation in the decree enforcing the papal sabbath will be a warning to us. It will then be time to leave the large cities, preparatory to leaving the smaller ones for retired homes in secluded places among the mountains.” In the same way that “Jerusalem being surrounded by armies” was their sign of the coming destruction, “the assumption of power on the part of our nation in the decree enforcing the papal sabbath will be a warning to us.” This national Sunday law signals the beginning of the great Time of Trouble, as Matthew 24:21 tells us, “For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be.” So, let’s take a closer look at what happened when the armies surrounded Jerusalem, and see what we can learn.

On page 560 of the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary, Commentary Series Vol. 8*, as a part of the “Jerusalem” entry we read:

“When the revolt against Rome broke out in the spring of A.D. 66, Jerusalem saw much bloodshed. Under Gessius Florus, the last procurator of Judea, Jews began to massacre Gentiles, and Gentiles Jews, until all semblance of order and government was gone. Cestius Gallus, the legate of Syria, took command of Judea and in the autumn of A.D. 66 marched against Jerusalem. Although at one point he penetrated as far as the northern wall of the Temple, he was repelled and for some unknown reason retreated, losing many of his soldiers on the march. The Christians, heeding the warning of Jesus (Matthew 24:15-20), took this opportunity to leave Jerusalem and found refuge in Pella in Perea.”

On pages 30-31 of *The Great Controversy* we find additional information:

“After the Romans under Cestius had surrounded the city, they unexpectedly abandoned the siege when everything seemed favorable for an immediate attack. The besieged, despairing of successful resistance, were on the point of surrender, when the Roman general withdrew his forces without the least apparent reason. But God's merciful providence was directing events for the good of His own people. The promised sign had been given to the waiting Christians, and now an opportunity was offered for all who would, to obey the Saviour's warning. Events were so overruled that neither Jews nor Romans should hinder the flight of the Christians. Upon the retreat of Cestius, the Jews, sallying from Jerusalem, pursued after his retiring army; and while both forces were thus fully engaged, the Christians had an opportunity to leave the city. At this time the country also had been cleared of enemies who might have endeavored to intercept them. At the time of the siege, the Jews were assembled at Jerusalem to keep the Feast of Tabernacles, and thus the Christians throughout the land were able to make their escape unmolested. Without delay they fled to a place of safety—the city of Pella, in the land of Perea, beyond Jordan.”

Before the Jews revolted against Rome, in the spring of A.D. 66, there was no reason for Jerusalem to be surrounded by armies. But after the revolt, everyone knew it would be just a matter of time before the Romans came to re-conquer the city. That fall, they came. Notice the sequence of events based on the above references.

1. In the spring of A.D. 66 the Jews revolt against Rome
2. In the fall of A.D. 66 the Roman army, under Cestius, came and surrounded Jerusalem
3. The Romans penetrated as far as the northern wall of the Temple
4. The Jews in the city were ready to surrender
5. The Romans unexpectedly withdrew and retreated
6. The Jews came out of the city, pursued and attacked the retreating Romans
6. The Romans lose many soldiers in the fighting
7. While the Jews and Romans were fighting, the Christians escape

This is all very fascinating, but notice another bit of interesting history. “From late A.D. 66 until the spring of A.D. 70, Jerusalem did not suffer any direct attack of the Romans. ... Titus began his siege of Jerusalem with 80,000 Roman soldiers in April A.D. 70.” *SDA Bible Dictionary*, page 560-561. After the initial “surrounding” of the city by Cestius, in the fall of A.D. 66, the Romans didn’t come back until 3½ years later, in the spring of A.D. 70! There was no apparent physical danger at the time the armies surrounded Jerusalem, and the Christians fled. [And yes, 3½ years *is* an *interesting* time period.]

So, why did Jesus say, Get out! Get out NOW! Don’t even go back to get your things! when there was no apparent physical danger, (except for the soldiers), and therefore no apparent reason to flee? The following quotation from *The Spirit of Prophecy Vol. 4*, page 27 raises this question even further.

“When the warning sign should be seen, judgment was to follow so quickly that those who would escape must make no delay. He who chanced to be upon the housetop must not go down through his house into the street; but he must speed his way from roof to roof until he reached the city wall, and be saved "so as by fire." Those who were working in the fields or vineyards must not take time to return for the outer garment laid aside while they should be toiling in the heat of the day.”

Notice that this event also fits a pattern found in a couple other significant Bible stories —the flood, and Sodom and Gommorah. There was no apparent reason for Noah and his family to be shut inside the ark —it didn’t start raining until seven days later. See Genesis 7:4, 16. Neither was there any apparent reason for Lot and his family to flee from Sodom —the fire and brimstone rained down *after* they had left. See Genesis 19:15-26. The pattern we find here is, God pulls out His people *before* there is any apparent physical danger —it is too late to get out when the danger is a “reality!”

But, there is a lot of difference between 7 days in Noah’s case, or a few hours in Lot’s case, and 3½ years! What was the “judgment” that “was to follow so quickly” that they weren’t even suppose to go back and get any of their things?

The answer for this question comes from analyzing a little deeper about these two stories, and a careful reading of the first chapter of *The Great Controversy*, (which is all about the destruction of Jerusalem). As the door shut after Noah and his family went into the ark probation essentially closed for the antediluvians. In the same way, it appears that as soon as the Christians left Jerusalem, probation closed and the Holy Spirit was withdrawn from the remaining people. Notice the following passages:

“The long-suffering of God toward Jerusalem only confirmed the Jews in their stubborn impenitence. In their hatred and cruelty toward the disciples of Jesus they rejected the last offer of mercy. Then God withdrew His protection from them and removed His restraining power from Satan and his angels, and the nation was left to the control of the leader she had chosen.” (*The Great Controversy*, page 28.)

“By stubborn rejection of divine love and mercy, the Jews had caused the protection of God to be withdrawn from them, and Satan was permitted to rule them according to his will.” (*The Great Controversy*, page 35.)

“We cannot know how much we owe to Christ for the peace and protection which we enjoy. It is the restraining power of God that prevents mankind from passing fully under the control of Satan. The disobedient and unthankful have great reason for gratitude for God's mercy and long-suffering in holding in check the cruel, malignant power of the evil one. But when men pass the limits of divine forbearance, that restraint is removed. God does not stand toward the sinner as an executioner of the sentence against transgression; but He leaves the rejectors of His mercy to themselves, to reap that which they have sown. Every ray of light rejected, every warning despised or unheeded, every passion indulged, every transgression of the law of God, is a seed sown which yields its unfailing harvest. The Spirit of God, persistently resisted, is at last withdrawn from the sinner, and then there is left no power to control the evil passions of the soul, and no protection from the malice and enmity of Satan. The destruction of Jerusalem is a fearful and solemn warning to all who are trifling with the offers of divine grace and resisting the pleadings of divine mercy. Never was there given a more decisive testimony to God's hatred of sin and to the certain punishment that will fall upon the guilty.” (*The Great Controversy*, 36.)

“The Saviour's prophecy concerning the visitation of judgments upon Jerusalem is to have another fulfillment, of which that terrible desolation was but a faint shadow. In the fate of the chosen city we may behold the doom of a world that has rejected God's mercy and trampled upon His law. Dark are the records of human misery that earth has witnessed during its long centuries of crime. The heart sickens, and the mind grows faint in contemplation. Terrible have been the results of rejecting the authority of Heaven. But a scene yet darker is presented in the revelations of the future. The records of the past—the long procession of tumults, conflicts, and revolutions, the “battle of the warrior . . . with confused noise, and garments rolled in blood” (Isaiah 9:5)—what are these, in contrast with the terrors of that day when the restraining Spirit of God shall be wholly withdrawn from the wicked, no longer to hold in check the outburst of human passion and satanic wrath! The world will then behold, as never before, the results of Satan's rule.” (*The Great Controversy*, pages 36-37)

It wasn't a physical danger the Christians were fleeing from, it was a *spiritual* danger. With the withdrawal of the Holy Spirit, and the nation left to the control of Satan, no wonder God wanted His people out of there!

So, with this in mind, let's turn our focus to the end-time parallel. “As the siege of Jerusalem by the Roman armies was the signal for flight to the Judean Christians, so the assumption of power on the part of our nation in the decree enforcing the papal sabbath will be a warning to us.” (*Testimonies for the Church Volume Five*, pages 464-465.) The national Sunday law is *our* sign that these things “are about to take place.” Notice also the following from *Testimonies for the Church Volume Five* page 451.

“By the decree enforcing the institution of the papacy in violation of the law of God, our nation will disconnect herself fully from righteousness. When Protestantism shall stretch her hand across the gulf to grasp the hand of the Roman power, when she shall reach over the abyss to clasp hands with spiritualism, when, under the influence of this threefold union, our country shall repudiate every principle of its Constitution as a Protestant and republican government, and shall make provision for the propagation of papal falsehoods and delusions, then we may know that the time has come for the marvelous working of Satan and that the end is near.

“As the approach of the Roman armies was a sign to the disciples of the impending destruction of Jerusalem, so may this apostasy be a sign to us that the limit of God's forbearance is reached, that the measure of our nation's iniquity is full, and that the angel of mercy is about to take her flight, never to return. The people of God will then be plunged into those scenes of affliction and distress which prophets have described as the time of Jacob's trouble.”

Here we find that the Abomination that causes Desolation is more than just a cryptic term for our signal to flee. It also describes a spiritual happening —the final rejection of God's mercy and the offer of His grace and the withdrawal of the Holy Spirit. Probation begins to close at the national Sunday law.

Notice also that this is happening at a group/national level, and therefore indicates that the group/nation as a whole has committed the unpardonable sin and that probation for that group has essentially closed. No wonder the message, “Come out of her My people!” is given in connection with this sign. (Revelation 18:4.)

As significant as this point is, before we close, let's go back to the idea of there being no apparent reason to flee when the signal for flight is given. Remember the wording from the *Testimonies for the Church Volume Five*, pages 464-465 quotation about “the decree enforcing the papal sabbath.” Satan has his counterfeit for everything, and the papal sabbath is his counterfeit for God's true Sabbath. So notice the wording of the Sabbath commandment in Exodus 20:8-11, and how it tells us to keep the Sabbath holy.

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord you God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your manservant, nor your maidservant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.”

According to the wording of this commandment, the way we are to keep the Sabbath holy is simply by not working, and resting. That is all that is mentioned here, it says nothing about “going to church.” Don't misunderstand me, attending church *is* important, the point here is just that it's not mentioned in the commandment. Therefore, the “the decree enforcing the papal sabbath” could just be a law enforcing “resting” and “not working” on Sunday, with nothing necessarily “religious,” (such as church

attendance), connected with it. A simple law making Sunday a national day of rest could be our sign! We could go along with a law like that, couldn't we? There would be no apparent "danger," and no apparent reason to "flee." But the prophet says, "It will then be time to leave the large cities, preparatory to leaving the smaller ones for retired homes in secluded places among the mountains." If we find ourselves living in a large city when the national Sunday law passes, we should not hesitate and get out! Remember the Christians in Jerusalem, in the fall of A.D. 66. Maybe they were ready, maybe they weren't; maybe they had a place to go, maybe they didn't, but they all heeded Christ's warning and left.

*The Great Controversy*, page 30 tells us, "Not one Christian perished in the destruction of Jerusalem. Christ had given His disciples warning, and all who believed His words watched for the promised sign." May we daily surrender to the Holy Spirit so we can be sealed and not have Him withdrawn from us. (See John 14:16.) May we "remember Lot's wife," (Luke 17:32), and be prepared mentally to let go of whatever we must leave behind when we flee. And may we make appropriate plans for our "flight" as we diligently watch for *our* "promised sign," so we will not perish in the coming destruction.

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