



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

IF WE ARE GOING TO BE FOUND —WHY FLEE?

by Jim Buller

Every once in a while, someone asks me whether I think we will be found when we flee to the mountains in the Time of Trouble. To which I answer, “Yes, I *expect* to be found.” The almost invariable response to this is, “Then *why* flee?”

The setting for this interaction rarely lends itself to any kind of explanation. So, my answer to this last question usually is, “The reason I am going to flee is because that is what Jesus has told us to do.” But really, there is a lot more to the overall picture.

First, the reason I expect we will be found, is based primarily on the following quotations:

“Soon I saw the saints suffering great mental anguish. They seemed to be surrounded by the wicked inhabitants of the earth. Every appearance was against them. Some began to fear that God had at last left them to perish by the hand of the wicked. But if their eyes could have been opened, they would have seen themselves surrounded by angels of God. Next came the multitude of the angry wicked, and next a mass of evil angels, hurrying on the wicked to slay the saints. But before they could approach God's people, the wicked must first pass this company of mighty, holy angels. This was impossible. The angels of God were causing them to recede and also causing the evil angels who were pressing around them to fall back.” *Early Writings*, page 283.

“When the protection of human laws shall be withdrawn from those who honor the law of God, there will be, in different lands, a simultaneous movement for their destruction. As the time appointed in the decree draws near, the people will conspire to root out the hated sect. It will be determined to strike in one night a decisive blow, which shall utterly silence the voice of dissent and reproof.

“The people of God —some in prison cells, some hidden in solitary retreats in the forests and the mountains— still plead for divine protection, while in every quarter companies of armed men, urged on by hosts of evil angels, are preparing for the work of death. ... With shouts of triumph, jeering, and imprecation, throngs of evil men are about to rush upon their prey.” *The Great Controversy*, page 635-636.

From the above, it appears that by the date of the Death Decree, we have been found, and are surrounded by evil men just waiting for midnight —when the decree goes into effect— to strike. But, “It is now, in the hour of utmost extremity, that the God of Israel will interpose for the deliverance of His chosen. ... It is at midnight that God manifests His power for the deliverance of His people.” *The Great Controversy*, page 636.

Second, I don't believe Jesus wants us to flee just to see if we can endure being cold, hungry, and uncomfortable while we are trying to survive up in the mountains. He has a definite reason *why* He wants us to flee. But to explain this, we first need to look at a bit of history. The prophetic parallel between what happened in the fall of A.D. 66, when the Christians fled Jerusalem after it was surrounded by the Roman armies, and what will happen at the beginning of the end-times, has been established elsewhere; so we'll just review by taking a look at *Testimonies for the Church Vol. 5*, pages 464-465.

“The time is not far distant, when, like the early disciples, we shall be forced to seek a refuge in desolate and solitary places. 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.”

As a side note, keep in mind that although in this study we will not necessarily delineate between the two, there are two phases to “fleeing to the mountains” —as alluded to in this quotation. The first phase is fleeing from the cities to the country, in response to the National Sunday Law. The second phase is fleeing to “the most desolate and solitary places,” in response to the Death Decree. (See *The Great Controversy*, page 626.)

Going back to the siege of Jerusalem by the Romans in the first century, notice the sequence of the events of the attack listed below. They are both interesting and significant. (This information has been taken from *The Great Controversy*, pages 30-31; and from the “Jerusalem” entry in the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary, Commentary Series Volume 8*, page 560. The phases in quotations are from *The Great Controversy*.)

1. the Romans march on Jerusalem and surround the city
2. the Jews in Jerusalem were at “the point of surrender”
3. when the Romans unexpectedly withdraw the attack
4. “the Jews, sallying from Jerusalem, pursued” the Romans, falling “upon their rear with such fierceness as to threaten them with total destruction.”
5. while the Jews and Romans “were thus fully engaged” the Christians “were able to make their escape unmolested”
6. “with great difficulty ... the Romans succeeded in making their retreat.”
7. “The Jews escaped almost without loss, and with their spoils returned in triumph to Jerusalem.”

Now notice the wording in the following quotation from *The Spirit of Prophecy Volume. 4*, page 27, which comments on Matthew 24:15-18. (Emphasis supplied).

“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.”

The Christians were instructed to flee, because “judgment was to follow so quickly” that they didn’t even have time to go down into their house to get their things, or go back to pick up their coat at the edge of the field! *The Great Controversy*, page 25 adds, “They must not hesitate a moment, lest they be involved in the general destruction.” But what was this “judgement?” What was this “general destruction.”

From the sequence of the attack noted above, there was no immediate physical danger to Jerusalem or the people in it. The Jews essentially won the battle, and the Romans didn’t come back for three and one-half years—which is plenty time to go back and grab a coat! Yet the Lord had said, “When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, ... flee to the mountains,” and don’t “go back to get” anything. Luke 21:20-21, Matthew 24:15-18. Obviously, since it wasn’t a *physical* judgement, or a *physical* destruction, it must therefore, have been a *spiritual* judgement. The “sign” of the armies surrounding Jerusalem was only the visible physical cue that something more significant was happening at the spiritual level—which is typical of the way God has done things through the ages. “The unseen” being “illustrated by the seen.” *Education* page 100.

As the Romans surrounded Jerusalem, signaling their intentions by planting their banners within the holy borders, God in His mercy was showing anyone who was familiar with “the blessings and the cursings” in Leviticus and Deuteronomy, and the prophecies in Daniel, especially chapter 9, what was going to happen. Even those who may not have believed in Jesus, or did not know that He had specifically mentioned this signal event, would have had a chance to recognize what was happening, and flee the city.

In Matthew 24:15-16, the Roman armies surrounding Jerusalem is referred to as the “Abomination of Desolation.” (Compare with Luke 21:20-21.) In different verses and different versions, the “Abomination of Desolation,” is also called the “Abomination *that causes* Desolation.” This is significant, because frequently we focus on the “Desolation,” and the “sign” that the Desolation is about to happen—such as the armies surrounding Jerusalem, or the National Sunday Law. But, we tend to overlook the “Abomination” *that causes* the Desolation. Without the Abomination there would not be the Desolation.

With this in mind, let’s take a look at Matthew 23:38 where Jesus tells the Jewish leaders, “Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.” Why did Jesus use this particular wording? And why did it strike terror in the hearts of the priests and rulers? (See *The Desire of Ages*, page 627.) If, at that point in time, Jesus proclaimed the house “desolate,” then the Abomination must have already happened *before* Jesus made this statement.

We find that this was indeed the case by looking at chapter 67 of *The Desire of Ages*, which deals with this encounter between Jesus and the priests and rulers the last time He was in the Temple before His death. Jesus made this declaration because, "Israel as a nation had divorced herself from God." And, "It was *evident* that He would *never be received by them* as the Messiah. *The final separation had come.*" *The Desire of Ages*, pages 620, 621, (emphasis supplied.) The reason Jesus said, "Behold, your house is left unto you desolate," was that the Jewish nation had closed its doors to salvation. This brings to mind the quotation from *Testimonies for the Church, Volume Five*, page 451 which says, "By the decree enforcing the institution of the papacy in violation of the law of God, our nation will disconnect herself fully from righteousness."

By the way, the rejection of Jesus as the Messiah by the priests and Pharisees should be a *major warning* to us. They were very religious, and apparently very spiritual people. Yet, because Jesus didn't fit *their* agenda, they refused to accept Him. They should have heeded the words of the prophets: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding." "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts." Proverbs 3:5, Isaiah 55:8-9. We would be wise to heed this counsel also.

But, back to the first century A.D. All this goes together with the prophecy in Daniel chapter 9, especially verse 27, which says, "Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week; but in the middle of the week, He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering. *And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate*, even until the consummation, which is determined, is poured out on the desolate." (Emphasis supplied.) The Abomination is the "wing," or *vehicle* that, in this case, *brings* the Desolation.

At the time of the flood, and Sodom and Gomorrah, the people were also destroyed because they had sealed off the possibility of any further response to God's grace. Once the "final separation" —the Abomination— had happened, there is no further point in their existence, and in both of these cases the Desolation followed the Abomination rather quickly. However in some other cases, such as Jerusalem in the first century, the Desolation is delayed —as was prophesied in Daniel 9:27. Note the following quotation from *The Great Controversy*, pages 27-28.

"For nearly forty years after the doom of Jerusalem had been pronounced by Christ Himself, the Lord delayed His judgments upon the city and the nation. Wonderful was the long-suffering of God toward the rejectors of His gospel and the murderers of His Son. The parable of the unfruitful tree represented God's dealings with the Jewish nation. The command had gone forth, "Cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?" (Luke 13:7) but divine mercy had spared it yet a little longer. There were still many among the Jews who were ignorant of the character and the work of Christ. And the children had not enjoyed the opportunities or received the light which their parents had spurned. Through the preaching of the apostles and their associates, God would cause light to shine upon them; they would be permitted to see how prophecy had been fulfilled, not only in the birth and life of Christ, but in His death and resurrection. The children were not condemned for the

sins of the parents; but when, with a knowledge of all the light given to their parents, the children rejected the additional light granted to themselves, they became partakers of the parents' sins, and filled up the measure of their iniquity.”

Although the Abomination *had* happened, and “the command had gone forth,” the judgement was delayed due to God’s mercy on those who were yet ignorant. Jerusalem also still had a part to play in God’s plan as a center for the fledgling church. Even so, the Desolation was “winging” its way. Once the ignorant had been given their chance, and church was sufficiently established in other areas, it certainly came.

But we still haven’t answered the question that was raised earlier. What *was* the “judgment” and “general destruction” that “was to follow so quickly,” that at the time the armies surrounded Jerusalem, the Christians were instructed not to even go back and get their coat at the edge of the field? We have already concluded that it was a spiritual judgement, but we need to be more specific. Looking back in chapter 67 of *The Desire of Ages*, mentioned earlier, we also find the following statement: “As the Son of God should pass out from those walls” —as Jesus leaves the temple for the last time at the end of Matthew 23 and beginning of Matthew 24— “*God's presence would be withdrawn forever from the temple built to His glory.*” *The Desire of Ages*, page 620, (emphasis supplied). Thus we find that as the people make their complete and final rejection of God’s grace, His presence is withdraw.

We also find this same idea in the first chapter of *The Great Controversy*, which deals with the destruction of Jerusalem. Notice the following quotations from pages 28-29 and page 36, (emphasis supplied).

“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. ... *There was no safety anywhere*. ... By their actions they had long been saying: ‘Cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us.’ Isaiah 30:11. Now their desire was granted. The fear of God no longer disturbed them. Satan was at the head of the nation, and the highest civil and religious authorities were under his sway.”

It appears that the “judgment” at the time the Romans surrounded Jerusalem, was the final withdrawal of the Holy Spirit from the city —which allowed Satan to come in and take control. No wonder Jesus told His people to *flee!* If Satan is going to be in charge of the city, it’s time to get out of town!

Anyone who would have stayed when the Lord had said, “Go!” would have been counted among the disobedient, and Satan would have had the right to claim them as his own. Once the Holy Spirit was withdrawn, there wouldn’t be Anyone to refute Satan’s claim or prevent him from exercising his right. And what’s more, the Spirit of Christ would no longer be present to *enable one to obey*. “Without Me you can do nothing.” “Without Christ we cannot subdue a single sin or overcome the smallest temptation.” John 15:5, *Testimonies for the Church Vol. 4*, page 355. So it’s also no wonder the record says, “Not

one Christian perished in the destruction of Jerusalem.” *The Great Controversy*, pages 30. The time of grace for those who remained in the city had ended.

To help us understand the parallels between what happened at Jerusalem and what will happen in our day, let’s take a look at a couple paragraphs from the reference mentioned earlier in *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.”

Although the Holy Spirit is not completely and finally withdrawn until the Close of Probation, (see the quotation and time-line at the end of this article), we need to recognize that the term, “Abomination that cause Desolation,” *is close of probation language* —as is brought out in the quotation above, where it says that “the limit of God's forbearance *is* reached, that the measure of our nation's iniquity *is* full.” Therefore, although probation remains open for individuals, it apparently closes for the governmental institutions and the large cities as a whole when “our nation will disconnect herself fully from righteousness” at the National Sunday Law. In connection with this, the Holy Spirit will also apparently be withdrawn from the government and the large cities, because “then we may know that the time has come for the marvelous working of Satan.” This explains why we are commanded to flee the large cities in connection with the National Sunday Law, in the same way the Christians in the first century were told to flee Jerusalem when the Roman armies surrounded it. If Satan is to be given control, it is understandable why God would want His children to get out of town!

It is also worth noting here that when the Christians fled from Jerusalem, they were *not* fleeing from persecutors. *The Great Controversy*, pages 31 says they “were able to make their escape unmolested.” If we leave when God has told us to go, there may also be no apparent *physical* reason to flee. “Fleeing,” is just God’s way of separating out His people, like He shut Noah and his family up in the ark, and like the angels took Lot and his family out of Sodom telling them to “flee to the mountains.” (See Genesis 19:17.) Notice also that neither Noah or Lot were fleeing from persecutors as such.

Having said this, we need to recognize that there *are* quotations such as *Early Writings*, pages 56-57, which talk about fleeing before angry mobs. But from the context of this quotation, this happens later during the Time of Trouble, and it may very well involve those who didn't flee earlier when they should have.

One of the reasons people sometimes give for not fleeing, is because "someone needs to stay around to do missionary work." However, based on what we have studied here, once the people in general have placed themselves beyond the reach of God's grace, this reason will no longer be valid. After the National Sunday Law, evangelism should only be done from a country base, (see *Country Living*, page 30), and under the direct guidance of the Holy Spirit. It will most likely be aimed at specific individuals—and will no doubt involve helping them to get out of town.

The true reasons for "fleeing" seem to be summed up in Revelation 18:4 which says, "Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues." Let's not be like Lot's wife, who, in spite of divine warnings for these same reasons, and angels who led her out by the hand, was unwilling to leave it all behind when the time came to flee. And more importantly, let's be sure to cooperate with what God is doing in our lives now, so the Holy Spirit won't be withdrawn from us.

Patriarchs and Prophets, page 201

When Christ shall cease His work as mediator in man's behalf, then this time of trouble will begin. Then the case of every soul will have been decided, and there will be no atoning blood to cleanse from sin. When Jesus leaves His position as man's intercessor before God, the solemn announcement is made, "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still." Revelation 22:11. Then the restraining Spirit of God is withdrawn from the earth.

