



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

IT'S TIME TO GET SERIOUS ABOUT GETTING READY FOR JESUS TO COME

by Jim Buller

Jesus said something very interesting toward the beginning of His great end-time prophecy in Matthew 24 that I over looked for a long time.

For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. All these are the beginning of sorrows. (Matthew 24:7-8, KJV.)

“Pestilences,” here is an old word for plague type ‘diseases.’ So for simplicity, we will just refer to the things Jesus listed here as, ‘wars, famines, diseases, and earthquakes.’ As someone in a group we were studying this with recently said, ‘Sounds like the evening news!’ But what does Jesus say about the ‘wars, famines, diseases, and earthquakes?’ He says, “All these are the *beginning of sorrows*.” Let’s note three specific things about this statement:

(1) ‘Wars, famines, diseases, and earthquakes’ are just the “*beginning of sorrows*.” As person in another group we were recently studying this with pointed out, there will also be other “sorrows.” ‘Wars, famines, diseases, and earthquakes’ are just the “beginning.” For example, Ellen White mentions “calamities” and “horrible accidents,” “fire and flood” in connection with the ‘wars, famines, diseases, and earthquakes.’

Calamities by land and sea, by fire and flood, by pestilence and famine, by horrible accidents, by earthquakes in divers places, all testify in unmistakable language that the end of all things is at hand, and that great Babylon is coming into remembrance before God. ... (*Signs of the Times*, October 1, 1894.)

We are standing on the threshold of the crisis of the ages. In quick succession the judgments of God will follow one another--fire, and flood, and earthquake, with war and bloodshed. (*Prophets and Kings*, page 278.)

Again, it 'sounds just like the evening news!'

(2) The word "sorrows" used in this passage has unfortunately lost a bit in the translation. The Greek word is 'odin,' (Strong's #5604). It is defined as: 'a pang or throe, especially of childbirth.' This same word is used in 1 Thessalonians 5:3, where, in the King James Version, it is translated as "travail."

For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.

Unfortunately, the way it was translated in Matthew 24:8, the word "sorrows" just appears to refer to disasters and other troubles, with no apparent connection to labor pains. But in 1 Thessalonians 5:3, it is easy to see that birth pains are exactly what this word is referring to. (Many of the more modern translations use the idea of 'birth pains' instead of words like "sorrows" or "travail" in these verses, which is probably actually a better translation.)

So, let's talk about 'birth pains' a bit. How do they happen? They begin slowly, but then become more frequent and more intense, until the baby is born. Therefore, from what Jesus said, we can expect that 'wars, famines, diseases, and earthquakes,' as well as "fire and flood" and other disasters will continue to become more frequent and more intense as we get closer to the end. Is this what we see happening in the world around us today? —Yes! Once more, it 'sounds just like the evening news!'

A week or two ago, I overheard a program by one of our tele-evangelists. He was quoting a lot of statistics showing that this is indeed what is happening. For example, there have been more major earthquakes in the last few years, than in the last several centuries combined!

Many other people are noticing this trend. They recognize that we are heading for some rough times, and they are even preparing for what they think is coming. However, most of them believe that after these rough times, things will eventually level out and return to 'normal' again. But from what Jesus has told us here, we know that it isn't going to work out that way. Things are only going to continue to get worse until He comes. Therefore, if we are going to get ready for Jesus' return, and the Time of Trouble which is going to happen just before He comes, we need to do it *now*! There isn't going to be a 'better' time in the future.

(3) If we recognize that 'wars, famines, diseases, and earthquakes' *are* already becoming more frequent and more intense, then we must also recognize that the end-time 'labor pains' *have already begun!* And, what do we do when we realize that a woman has gone into labor? Do we say, 'Oh, I'll be off work in a few hours. We'll take you to the doctor when I get home?' Do we say, 'The Big Game has just started! We'll go to the hospital when it's over?' No! As soon as we recognize that a woman has gone into labor it is no longer time for 'business as usual!' We drop *everything!* and take some decided action! Let's get that lady to the maternity unit!

Now, please don't misunderstand me here. I'm not suggesting that we run off 'half-cocked' and do something foolish. The motion picture industry has had a lot of fun showing the foolish things people do when they are not prepared for a woman to go into labor. But that's exactly the point. We do foolish things when we are *not* prepared.

Noah's 3-Point Preparation Plan

Since Jesus said that the end-times would be “just like the days of Noah,” (Matthew 24:37 NASB), the ‘definite action’ that I’m suggesting we take is based on what Noah did to prepare for the ‘end of the world’ in his day. His plan of action is outlined in Hebrews 11:7.

“By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, ...”

1. Be very deliberate and intentional about our relationship with God.

Genesis 6:9 says, “Noah walked with God.” Usually, we attribute ‘walking with God’ to Enoch who was ‘translated.’ But the Genesis record also says that “Noah walked with God.” We find the same idea in John 15:4-5, where Jesus tells us, “abide in Me.” So let’s focus on ‘abiding’ in Jesus, and ‘walking’ with Him as we look forward to being translated at His return.

2. Allow the Holy Spirit to work through us to benefit and bless others.

In John 15:1-8, Jesus says that the result of us being connected to Him will be ‘bearing much fruit.’ A study of the function of the various parts of a plant shows that ‘bearing fruit’ is something plants do, not for themselves, but for *others!* We also find that plants essentially put their whole life energy into ‘bearing fruit.’ So to “bearing much fruit” means to have an others-centered focus in life, rather than a self-centered focus.

In the beginning, God was revealed in all the works of creation. It was Christ that spread the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth. It was His hand that hung the worlds in space, and fashioned the flowers of the field. “His strength setteth fast the mountains.” “The sea is His, and He made it.” Ps. 65:6; 95:5. It was He that filled the earth with beauty, and the air with song. And upon all things in earth, and air, and sky, He wrote the message of the Father's love.

Now sin has marred God's perfect work, yet that handwriting remains. Even now all created things declare the glory of His excellence. There is nothing, save the selfish heart of man, that lives unto itself. No bird that cleaves the air, no animal that moves upon the ground, but ministers to some other life. There is no leaf of the forest, or lowly blade of grass, but has its ministry. (*Desire of Ages*, pages 20-21.)

As it came from the Creator's hand, everything existed for the purpose of benefitting and blessings others. “The true object of life is ministry.” (*Christ's Object Lessons*, page 326.) It was Satan who introduced selfishness and a self centered focus in life. But as we re-connect with Jesus, His Spirit will work through us to “bear much fruit,” and we will live our lives to benefit and bless others.

Although this “bearing fruit” would definitely include sharing the gospel message, especially now that we are in the end-times, (see Matthew 28:19-20, 24:14 and Revelation 14:6-7), benefitting and blessing others is not limited to just the ‘spreading the gospel.’

To reach the people, wherever they are, and whatever their position or condition, and to help them in every way possible —this is true ministry. (*Ministry of Healing*, page 156.)

Remember also that Noah wasn’t preparing the ark just to save himself. He “prepared an ark for the saving of his household” —which, by the way, includes all of us! Which brings us to the third point in Noah’s plan.

3. Be serious about preparing physically for what we have been “divinely warned” about.

Noah “moved with godly fear” —he took the job of preparing the ark *seriously!* So what have we been “divinely warned” about? And what have we been told to do to prepare?

He [the ‘image of the beast’] causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads, and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name. (Revelation 13:16-17.)

In the same way that Noah was told to prepare an ark for the flood that he was “divinely warned” about, we too have been told what we need to do to physically prepare for not being able to buy or sell, because the problems caused by these ‘economic sanctions’ will be “very serious.”

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. (*Country Living*, pages 9-10.)

What’s more, as the Time of Trouble progresses, things will get even worse!

He [the beast with two lamb-like horns] was granted power to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed. (Revelation 13:15.)

In response, to this ‘death decree’ we have been counseled:

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. (*Great Controversy*, page 626.)

If we are wise, like Noah, we will take our physical preparations for what we have be “divinely warned” about seriously! We will get set up in the country where we can ‘raise our own provisions’ for when we will not be able to buy or sell during the first part of the Time of Trouble. We will also learn how to survive in the wilderness so we will know what to do when we flee to the “most desolate and solitary places” at the death decree during the final part of the Time of Trouble.

But Wait, Isn’t There Such a Thing as ‘False Labor’

Yes, there *is* such a thing as ‘false labor.’ However, even if we suspect it might be false labor, we still take definite actions and we still get the lady to the doctor! It’s still no longer time for ‘business as usual.’ It’s just not worth the risk.

Historically, if there was a ‘false labor’ in connection with the sequence of end-time events, it probably would have been linked with the Blair Bill back in 1888-1889. But notice what the prophet wrote at that time.

If our people continue in the listless attitude in which they have been, God cannot pour upon them His Spirit. They are unprepared to co-operate with Him. They are not awake to the situation and do not realize the threatened danger. They should feel now, as never before, their need of vigilance and concerted action.

The peculiar work of the third angel has not been seen in its importance. God meant that His people should be far in advance of the position which they occupy today. But now, when the time has come for them to spring into action, they have the preparation to make. When the National Reformers began to urge measures to restrict religious liberty, our leading men should have been alive to the situation and should have labored earnestly to counteract these efforts. It is not in the order of God that light has been kept from our people—the very present truth which they needed for this time. Not all our ministers who are giving the third angel’s message really understand what constitutes that message. The National Reform movement has been regarded by some as of so little importance that they have not thought it necessary to give much attention to it and have even felt that in so doing they would be giving time to questions distinct from the third angel’s message. May the Lord forgive our brethren for thus interpreting the very message for this time.

The people need to be aroused in regard to the dangers of the present time. The watchmen are asleep. We are years behind. Let the chief watchmen feel the urgent necessity of taking heed to themselves, lest they lose the opportunities given them to see the dangers.

If the leading men in our conferences do not now accept the message sent them by God, and fall into line for action, the churches will suffer great loss. When the watchman, seeing the sword coming, gives the trumpet a certain sound, the people along the line will echo the warning, and all will have opportunity to make ready for the conflict. But too often the leader has stood

hesitating, seeming to say: "Let us not be in too great haste. There may be a mistake. We must be careful not to raise a false alarm." The very hesitancy and uncertainty on his part is crying: "'Peace and safety.' Do not get excited. Be not alarmed. There is a great deal more made of this religious amendment question than is demanded. This agitation will all die down." Thus he virtually denies the message sent from God, and the warning which was designed to stir the churches fails to do its work. The trumpet of the watchman gives no certain sound, and the people do not prepare for the battle. Let the watchman beware lest, through his hesitancy and delay, souls shall be left to perish, and their blood shall be required at his hand. (*Testimonies to the Church Vol. 5, page 714-715.*)

Notice that she did *not* say, "Oh don't worry. This is just 'false labor.' The end-times aren't going to happen for at least another hundred and twenty-five years." Quite the opposite! She said, "The people need to be aroused in regard to the dangers of the present time." "They should feel now, as never before, their need of vigilance and concerted action!" And she spoke strongly against saying, "Let's not get too excited, and raise a false alarm. This will all die down." Even if it is false labor, you still take decided action! It's just not worth the risk!

Note also that back in 1888-1889 the beast's 'deadly wound' was not yet healed. Neither was the USA a superpower. (See Revelation 13.) Whereas now, everything is 'all lined up!'

The Danger of Saying/Thinking, 'Peace and Safety'

So, why then do so many Christians, even those who claim to believe that 'Jesus is coming soon,' have such a complacent, non-concerned attitude about what's going on in the world today? Why is everything still 'business as usual?'

Notice the rest of the passage back in 1 Thessalonians 5. Starting at verse one,

But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape. (Verses 1-3.)

Here it is prophesied that people will be complacent about "the times and seasons," that they will say, "Peace and safety!" —"Let us not be in too great haste. There may be a mistake. We must be careful not to raise a false alarm. ... Do not get excited. ... This ... will all die down." But look what happens when they say this! —"then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape." The complacent ones will "not escape" the "sudden destruction." Let's read on in 1 Thessalonians.

But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober. (Verses 4-6.)

In addition to the symbolism of a woman that is about to give birth, Paul uses the same “thief in the night” symbolism here that Jesus also uses farther on in Matthew 24.

Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect. (Matthew 24:42-44.)

In the same way that we don't know when a thief might show up, we are to continually “watch,” and continually “be ready.” If we are not ready, we need to get ready! —and then stay ready! But unfortunately, most of us “are years behind.” It is time brothers and sisters, to get serious about getting ready for Jesus to come!

But, Haven't We Been Told Not to Prepare Physically?

This idea comes from a quotation on page 56 of *Early Writings*, (and similar quotations found on page 181 of *Maranatha*, and *Broadside*2, January 31, 1849). In a section entitled, “Duty in View of the Time of Trouble,” the first sentence 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”

Not to long ago, after quoting this sentence, someone told me, ‘It's clear to me! We are *not* supposed to prepare for our temporal wants.’ But, might not this be the same as a person who doesn't have a correct understanding of the state of the dead saying ‘It's clear to me! When people die, they go to heaven, (or hell),’ after they read the typically way what Jesus told the thief on the cross is punctuated, or the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus? (See Luke 23:43, and Luke 16:19-31.)

If we want an excuse not to prepare, apparently here we have it. But is it ever safe to build your case on just one verse from the Bible, or one sentence from Ellen White's writings? —Of course not. So, we must read on. As we look at the rest of the paragraph, notice three things: (1) The main issue here is our need to “trust wholly in God.” (2) The wilderness context —that this passage is referring to the final part of the Time of Trouble when we will flee to the “most desolate and solitary places.” (*Great Controversy*, page 626). And (3), if we are not supposed to “make any provision for our temporal wants,” how *is* God planning to feed us?

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.

Let's begin by answering the question, 'How *is* God planning to feed us?' It appears that He will "send ravens to feed us ... or rain manna from heaven." But notice the first two words in that sentence. They are, "If necessary" —this is 'back-up plan' language. So, if the ravens and manna are God's back-up plan, what is His main plan? We find it in the phrase just before this sentence, which says, "God is able to spread a table for us in the wilderness."

So, let's explore what it means to "spread a table for us in the wilderness," and look at another quotation that uses this same wording.

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. (*The Ministry of Healing*, page 200.)

When did this, "will never cease," begin? —way back at creation! And it is worth noting, that throughout history, native peoples have relied on these wilderness blessings as they have 'lived off the land' for thousands of years.

But before we continue this train of thought, let's go back to the main issue in the quotation we are studying being our need to "trust wholly in God;" and let's look at another quote that also deals with God's provisions and our "necessity of trusting" in Him.

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. (*Steps to Christ*, page 123.)

In this quotation Jesus points to the birds as an example of what it means to trust in God's provision. But notice that, *He doesn't drop the food into their mouths*. Just like the native peoples mentioned earlier, the birds have to go out and gather what they need. In the same way, when we "trust wholly in God" relying on the table He has "spread ... for us in the wilderness," *we too* will have to gather and craft the things we need from what He provides in nature.

So then, what does it mean, to not "make any provision for our temporal wants." From this quotation it is obvious that we should not be stashing food out in the wilderness for that time; and by extension, when we flee to the wilderness we shouldn't try to carry enough provisions in our packs to last until Jesus comes either. When we flee to the "most desolate and solitary places" we will be trusting in, and relying on,

God's wilderness blessings for our provisions, but we still need to prepare by learning how to recognize and process them.

Don't Be Deceived

As Jesus began His end-time prophecy in Matthew 24, the first thing He said was, "Take heed that no one deceives you." (Verse 4.) His concern about His people being deceived continues to be a theme throughout this talk He had with His disciples, known as the 'Olivet Discourse.' He ends the discourse with four parables. (See Matthew 24:45 through 25:46.) Note that these parables all have an end-time context, and they are all about 'servants' of a master/bridegroom who has gone away and then returns. So in these parables Jesus is exposing deceptions that will be common *in the church* in the end-times!

Brothers and sisters, please study these parables! Don't be tempted to say in your heart, "My master is delaying his coming," like the unfaithful servant in the first parable. (Matthew 24:48.) Notice particularly the last two parables, the parable of the 'Talents,' and of the 'Sheep and the Goats.' (Matthew 25:14-30, and 31-46.) Both of these parables describe people who are expecting to enter the kingdom, but get kicked out instead! (No wonder there will be "weeping and gnashing of teeth!") The reason they were kicked out is because they hadn't *done anything*. Don't be deceived by the currently prevalent false gospel that promises salvation without doing anything because 'Jesus has done it all at the cross.' The pleasing notion that we don't need to physically prepare is just an extension of this false gospel. Don't be misled.

Because of these deceptions, and Laodicean laziness in general, "We are years behind." But now it is time to get serious about getting ready for Jesus to come! The end-time 'birth-pang' have already begun, and it is no longer time for 'business as usual.' Let's follow Noah's example by:

1. Being very deliberate and intentional about our relationship with God.
2. Allowing the Holy Spirit to work through us to benefit and bless others.
3. Being serious about preparing physically for what we have been "divinely warned" about.

Let's be willing to let God to "prune" anything out of our lives that keeps us from being productive for Him—even 'good' things. (See John 15:2.) Let's be willing to let go of whatever might get in the way of our relationship with Him, or whatever takes up our time, energy, and resources and keeps us from helping others, or making the physical preparations we need to make.