



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?

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 are mainly centered around what Jesus said in Matthew 24:17-18, and what God told Ellen White to write, found on page 56 of *Early Writing*. In this study, we will take a look at both of these passages, and compare them with other scripture 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.”

Some would have us believe that since this quotation 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,” that we are not to do anything in a physical sense to prepare for the Time of Trouble. It has even been said that preparing shows a *lack* of faith because it would not be trusting “wholly in God.” And, I suppose, if you want an excuse not to prepare, here you have it. But, let's study this quotation a little more closely.

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 is our “trust” in God? Is our trust in our skills, abilities, and preparations, 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 a way back in the bush. The husband had to be away for a while, leaving his wife and children at the mission station. During this time, a deadly snake came in their house. The wife, who was not that familiar with firearms, got the gun her husband 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 lack skills, have bare shelves, and empty pockets, in order to be trusting *wholly* in God? Somehow many of us think that to *truly* be trusting *completely* in God we must be in a position where we have literally nothing. But, let us look at another story.

In 1 Samuel 17 is the familiar story of David and Goliath. But notice 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 skill with a sling. (See Judges 20:16 for an example!) Notice also what David tells King Saul about 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.” (1 Samuel 17:36.)

Notice also that when David went out to fight Goliath, he took not only his sling, but also his staff, —a long-range weapon *and* a short-range weapon. He also picked up five smooth stones. (See 1 Samuel 17:40.) 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!

Notice what David told Goliath as he came on the field of battle. “You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin.” *Goliath* was the one coming in his own strength and ability. “But I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts.” David was essentially saying, whatever happens here is not up to either of our skills and abilities, it is up to *God*.

Upon closer examination, we find the difference between David and Goliath is the same as the difference between the wise and foolish girls in the parable of the 10 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,) Goliath *thought he had enough*. This brings to mind the old memory verse from Proverbs 3:5-6. “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, do not lean on your own understanding, [or abilities], in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will direct your paths.” Here we are counseled not to rely on what we have, but to trust wholly in God. This will lead us to “check in” with Him in everything we do, to make sure we continually have extra help from Him.

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

There are many other Bible stories that illustrate this same point. Noah building the ark is another excellent example. (See the study in “Preparing to Stand” #2 —email me and ask for a copy if you need one.) God *told* Noah to build the ark. Does this

mean that now Noah was going to save himself, and depend on his own skills and abilities? —No. Hebrews 11:7 says it was “by *faith*” that Noah built the ark. Which brings us to another key thought in this whole issue. Faith and works *go together*. See James chapter 2. God *and* Noah worked on the ark building project *together*. *Patriarchs and Prophets* page 95 says, “All that man could do was done to render the work perfect” —think about it, *perfect* workmanship on Noah’s part!— “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 was doing *perfect* work, he was still relying on *GOD ALONE!* In spite of *all* he did, he was still “trusting *wholly* in God!”

Unfortunately, we have the idea that if God is going to do something, it somehow leaves us out of the picture; and if *we* do something, it leaves God out. I believe it is “enmity” —sinful human nature’s desire to keep a distance between us and God— that causes us to think this way. Our enmity doesn’t want to let us and God get together. (See “Preparing to Stand” #11 for a study on this important subject —email me for a copy if you need one.) But the Bible says we are to be “labourers *together with* God.” 1 Corinthians 3:9 (emphasis supplied.) And as mentioned earlier, in James chapter 2, it is very clear that faith and works *go together!* This is the essence of Righteousness by Faith, and the only way it really works. Notice the following quotation from *Patriarchs and Prophets*, page 290, (emphasis supplied).

“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.”

The missionary wife, David, Noah, and the Hebrews in the quotation above all *acted in faith*. They *worked together with God* by *trusting wholly in Him*, and *doing all that was in their power to do*. One of the reasons we have problems with this concept is because of our way of thinking. We think the very fact that *we* do *something*, means we must be relying at *least in part* on our own ability, and therefore it can not be relying *completely* on God. So, doing all that is in our power to do, must not be trusting *wholly* in Him. But, God isn’t limited to our way of thinking. (See Isaiah 55:8-9.) Based on the above, it is clear that in order to be trusting wholly in Him and truly acting by faith, it *also* means that we must do all that is in our power to do —realizing that this is still not enough, and that we need extra help from God.

Let us go back now and focus on the word “provision,” in the *Early Writings*, page 56 quotation where it says, “It is contrary to the Bible to make any *provision* for our temporal wants in the time of trouble.” Let’s compare this with the same word on

pages 9-10 of *Country Living*. “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, why would God instruct Ellen White to tell us *not* to make provision in one place, and then tell us that we *should* make provisions in another place? —that we should even raise *our own* provisions!

The answer to this, lies in the term “the time of trouble.” Notice the way this term is used in the following quotation from *Early Writings*, pages 85-86, where she refers to something she had written earlier on page 33.

“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.”

Notice that the original mention of, “the commencement of the time of trouble,” was on page 33. A clarification of the term is then given on pages 85-86. Notice also the quotation we have been studying, on page 56, is in-between pages 33 and 85. So, why did she have to clarify the term on page 85-86? It must have been because her readers didn’t quite understand what she meant when she used the term on page 33.

Notice also from this quotation that there are two parts to the Time of Trouble. (See also the end-time time-line study in “Preparing to Stand” Extra #5 —email me for a copy if you need one.) 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 called, the “Big,” or “Great, Time of Trouble,” or “Jacob’s Time of Trouble.”

Nowadays, when we say, “the Time of Trouble,” we usually refer to the entire Time of Trouble —both parts. However, it seems that when she wrote, “the Time of Trouble,” on page 33, most of the people at the time thought she referred to the *second* part of the Time of Trouble. Therefore later, on page 85-86, she needed to clarify, that when she wrote, “at the commencement of the time of trouble,” on page 33, she was referring to the *first* part of the Time of Trouble, before the Close of Probation. In fact, when we notice the date, 1847, it is very likely that she *herself* didn’t completely understand the distinction between the two parts of the Time of Trouble when she wrote what she did on page 33. This was back in the early days of our church, and many of these details were still in the process of being discovered.

This isn’t the only place in Ellen White’s writings where the term, the “time of trouble,” is used referring to the second part of the Time of Trouble. As an example, notice the use of the term in *Patriarchs and Prophets*, page 201, and how it obviously refers to the time after the close of probation during the plagues. It says, “When Christ shall cease His work as mediator in man's behalf, then this time of trouble will begin.”

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. This is when we will not be able to buy or sell, (see Revelation 13:17). In many instances, part of the process of raising our own provisions will involve storing up a year or more's worth of what we have raised. Take potatoes for instance. After this year's potato crop comes off, we won't have any more potatoes from our gardens until next year's crop is ready. Therefore we will need to make a root cellar, or have some other way to store up enough potatoes to last until next year's potatoes come out of the garden. In fact, if we are wise, we may even store up more than a year's worth, just in case next year's crop isn't that plentiful. Though we may not be used to storing up this many potatoes, this is not “laying up” or “stockpiling.” It is simply common practice in an agriculturally based life-style—which was much more common when she wrote this than it is now, so the people understood what she meant.

The reason the *Early Writings*, page 56, quotation says we should *not* “make any provision for our temporal wants,” is because this is referring to the second part of the Time of Trouble. About the time Probation Closes and the Seven Last Plagues begin, a “Death Decree” is 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.”

At the Death Decree we *will* leave it all behind—our country homes, *and* whatever potatoes might still be left in the root cellar. Because we will be going to the “*most* desolate and solitary places”—which would be past the end of the road, and even a ways off the trail—this flight will be on foot. So we wouldn't be able to carry enough potatoes to feed ourselves until Jesus came anyway. We will then have to rely on God's ability “to spread a table for us in the wilderness.” And, as we notice the “wilderness” context of the last half of the paragraph on page 56 of *Early Writings*, it is obvious that this quotation is referring to the second part of the Time of Trouble.

“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.”

This brings us back to what Jesus said in Matthew 24:17-18. “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 here to, “Drop everything and run?” when the time comes to “flee to the mountains.” Many of us think the answer is obviously, “Yes.” But let's look a little more closely at what Jesus actually said.

For the sake of simplicity, let's focus on verse 18 which says, “And let him who is in the field not go back to get his cloak.” Suppose, at the time the Roman armies came

and surrounded Jerusalem, a Christian still had his coat on. Would it be OK to flee with it, or should he take it off and leave it behind? Or, suppose he just happened to lay it down on the edge of the field that was in the same direction he would go when he fled. Would it be OK to pick it up as he ran past?

Read them again if you need to, but Jesus did *not* say, “Drop everything and run!” in these verses. What He *did* say was “*Don't go back!*” This is a significant difference! And again, we find this same message in the parable of the 10 Virgins. When the foolish girls found out they really did not have enough oil, they had to “*go back*” —and as a result they were left out. In contrast, the wise girls already had extra oil *with* them, when the crisis came! Again, we find that the issue is not about “having nothing” physically, (if it was, perhaps we should leave behind more than just our coats). But in fact, the girls who had “extra” are praised for being wise.

Since faith involves both hearing and acting on the Word, (see Romans 10:17 and Matthew 7:24), let's remember that in addition to the instruction above, Jesus also said, “Watch” and “Be ready.” (See Matthew 24:43-44.) So, let's picture a faithful Christian in Jerusalem a few months before the armies surround the city. He had been *watching* as Jesus told them to. When the Jews revolted against the Romans, (in the spring of AD 66,) he knew it was only a matter of time until the armies arrived to put down the revolt! It would soon be time to flee! So, he prays for wisdom, and does some serious thinking about where he should go when he flees. As he continues to pray about the situation, the Holy Spirit reminds him about his ancestors at the first Passover, with their shoes on their feet, their staff in their hand, all packed and ready, just waiting for the signal to go. Putting this together with what Jesus said about “*being ready*,” he puts together his pack. Not too much stuff, because “fleeing” means moving fast and traveling light. Just simple basic, multipurpose items to cover the essentials. At home, he keeps it beside the door, so it can easily be grabbed as he leaves. When he goes somewhere, he takes it along, so if he has to flee while he is away from home, he will already have it *with* him. Sure, he gets laughed at, but this gives him an opportunity to witness and to warn others. If he is out working in the field, he takes care to lay it with his coat on the edge of the field in the direction that he would flee, so he could easily pick them up as he ran past.

Does this mean that he is not trusting wholly in God —No. He is obeying Jesus' instructions to “watch” and “be ready,” he is doing all that is in his power to do, and he is relying on extra help from God. Shouldn't we be just as prayerful and thoughtful in our preparations?

Later, after the Christians fled from Jerusalem, as they made camp for that first night, who was better off? —the one who had his pack, or the one who hadn't been watching, and wasn't ready, and had to leave even his coat behind?

“Preparing to Stand” Contact Information:

jabuller@juno.com

Jim Buller
3520 Harmon Rd
Bakersfield, CA 93307