

Readings for the Week of Prayer

To be read from Friday, December 7,
through Sabbath, December 15, 2012

The Signs
of the Times

Introduction

The Lord speaks to human beings and especially to His church in numerous ways. Hebrew 1:1. In Old Testament times, He revealed great truths through the patriarchs and prophets. In the fullness of time, He spoke by His beloved Son and the apostles. Down through the centuries, He inspired His servants and sent messages to human beings through the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, His providence and all nature constitute open books which all mankind in all ages and in every country may read. And this is not all; He has still more channels of light to communicate to us. A special place in the Lord's revelation to His people and to humanity is reserved for "signs of the times." Many passages in the Holy Scriptures are dedicated to this serious subject, and Matthew 24 focuses entirely on these signs.

Speaking to His disciples about the spiritual condition of the Jews, Jesus explained that serious consequences would come to the people of that generation living in Jerusalem and to people in general. Matthew 23:36-39. Therefore the disciples were intensely interested to know "when" this would happen to their beloved people and also "what" would be the sign of His coming and "of the end of the world." Matthew 24:3. What would happen to the Jewish people was clearly presented along with the bigger picture of what would take place at the end of time; thus in this chapter Jesus gives a snapshot also of our time.

Referring to the dual application of the prophecies of Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21, the inspired messenger writes: "The prophecy which He uttered was twofold in its meaning; while foreshadowing the destruction of Jerusalem, it prefigured also the terrors of the last great day...."

"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." —*The Great Controversy*, pp. 25, 36.

The signs presented by the Saviour include conditions in society, as well in the religious world and even upheavals in nature. There will be wars and rumors of war among nations and people, entire countries and classes rising up against others. The religious sphere will be characterized by increasing iniquity, decreasing love and faith, scandals, betrayal, and hatred. False prophets and a false messiah will arise, and there will be persecution of faithful believers. Nature itself will suffer convulsions; and there will be famines, pestilences, seaquakes, and earthquakes in many places, in addition to signs in the sun, moon, and stars. These are not all of the signs mentioned in the Scriptures, but they suffice to present a situation that is so impressive that everyone should be aroused to action. God's people will be tested, and everything that can be shaken will be shaken. "But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved." Matthew 24:13. Through these signs God is now speaking to His people and to the world.

"Until Christ shall appear in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory," the messenger of the Lord writes, "men will become perverse in spirit and turn from the truth to fables. The church will yet see troublous times. She will prophesy in sackcloth. But although she must meet heresies and persecutions, although she must battle with the infidel and the apostate, yet by the help of God she is bruising the head of Satan. The Lord will have a people as true as steel, and with faith as firm as the granite rock. They are to be His witnesses in the world, His instrumentalities to do a special, a glorious work in the day of His preparation." —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, pp. 594, 595.

"Christ had bidden His people watch for the signs of His advent and rejoice as they should behold the tokens of their coming King. 'When these things begin to come to pass,' He said, 'then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh.' He pointed His followers to the budding

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trees of spring, and said: 'When they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand. So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand.' Luke 21:28, 30, 31." —*The Great Controversy*, pp. 308, 309.

Dear brothers and sisters throughout the world, it is time for the people of God to wake up; every year and every month we are nearer the great day of the Lord. More than ever, now is the time to stand up and be prepared for the fulfillment of the great work which has been entrusted to us. "Christians should be preparing for what is soon to break upon the world as an overwhelming surprise, and this preparation they should make by diligently studying the word of God and striving to conform their lives to its precepts. The tremendous issues of eternity demand of us something besides an imaginary religion, a religion of words and forms, where truth is kept in the outer court.... Let the word of God speak to the heart." —*Prophets and Kings*, p. 626.

Dear fellow believers united in one hope, let this Week of Prayer be a time of consecration and unity, a time to thank the Lord for His blessings, to ask Him for forgiveness of all our shortcomings, and to dedicate ourselves fully to Him. Let us use these opportunities for united prayer to meet together, counsel together, and pray together in one spirit. Let us progress as the signs of the times advance.

The last Sabbath, December 15, will be a day of fasting and prayer when all the believers unite to close the Week of Prayer and present their special offerings of gratitude to the Lord for the blessings received during the past months. This offering is devoted entirely to the advancement of the work on a worldwide level.

Considering the seriousness and solemnity of our days, brethren from different countries have written articles to help prepare God's people for what lies ahead. Let us contribute to their efforts and do everything we can to make this Week of Prayer a great blessing for all and a significant step in our preparation to meet the coming Lord.

—*The brothers and sisters
of the General Conference*

"Christ gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. His people are to preserve their peculiar character as His representatives. There is work for every one of them to do. The rich should bring their means, the honored their influence, the learned their wisdom, the poor their virtue, if they would be effective workers with God. They are to bring themselves into right relation with God, that they may reflect the light of the glory of God that shines in the face of Jesus Christ. We read of a class who put far off the day of the coming of Jesus; but upon such His coming will be as a thief in the night, and they will be suddenly overtaken with destruction. How many there are who are willing to be rocked to sleep in the cradle of carnal security; but it is time for us to wake out of sleep. Says the apostle, 'We are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober.'

"The apostle prayed that love might abound more and more. There must be a living faith, before there can be a living experience. There are many who have a certain formal knowledge of Christ, and an indefinite faith that does not have an active influence upon the life and character. This faith is not a saving faith. Our love for Jesus must commence here, if we expect to love Him through the ages of eternity. All who love Christ will talk of Him. How shall the world know of the blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of your Lord and Saviour, unless you make it the theme of your thought and conversation? If our hearts are rejoicing in the hope of beholding our coming Saviour, shall we not speak of it to others? 'Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.' We shall have the Spirit of Christ, if we are in union with Him; and with the same untiring love and patience, we shall seek that which is lost. One soul is worth the world. It is the purchase of the blood of Christ, and those who really love Christ will feel the value of the souls for whom He shed His precious blood.

"The glory of the eternal world is just before us. Are you forwarding your treasure from this perishing earth to the land of safety? What care is taken to secure proper titles to your worldly possessions. Has your thought been exercised in regard to securing a title to the heavenly possessions? Your worldly estates will soon pass away, notwithstanding all your anxiety and toil. You must leave them all sometime. You may die before the coming of Jesus, or you may live till His appearing; however it is, the thoughts and ambitions of earth must be relinquished; but if your treasure is laid up on high, your riches will be incorruptible, undefiled, and will never pass away." —*Signs of the Times*, July 27, 1888.

“When Will This Happen?”

By Ellen G. White

“And as He sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto Him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of Thy coming, and of the end of the world?” Matthew 24:3.

Introduction

One of the most solemn and yet most glorious truths revealed in the Bible is that of Christ’s second coming to complete the great work of redemption. To God’s pilgrim people, so long left to sojourn in “the region and shadow of death,” a precious, joy-inspiring hope is given in the promise of His appearing, who is “the resurrection and the life,” to “bring home again His banished.” The doctrine of the second advent is the very keynote of the Sacred Scriptures. From the day when the first pair turned their sorrowing steps from Eden, the children of faith have waited the coming of the Promised One to break the destroyer’s power and bring them again to the lost Paradise. Holy men of old looked forward to the advent of the Messiah in glory, as the consummation of their hope. Enoch, only the seventh in descent from them that dwelt in Eden, he who for three centuries on earth walked with his God, was permitted to behold from afar the coming of the Deliverer. “Behold,” he declared, “the Lord cometh with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgment upon all.” Jude 14, 15. The patriarch Job in the night of his affliction exclaimed with unshaken trust: “I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth:... in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another.” Job 19:25-27. –*The Great Controversy*, p. 299.

The Lord is soon coming, and we must be ready and waiting for His appearing. O, how glorious it will be to see Him, and be welcomed as His redeemed ones. Long have we waited, but our hope is not to grow dim. If we can but see the King in His beauty, we shall be forever blessed. I feel as if I must cry

aloud, “Homeward bound!” We are nearing the time when Christ will come in power and great glory to take His ransomed ones to their eternal home. – *The Signs of the Times*, April 19, 1905.

When will it happen?

The exact time of Christ’s second coming is not revealed. Jesus said, No man knoweth the day nor the hour. But He also gave signs of His coming, and said, “When ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors.” He bade them, as the signs of His coming should appear, “Look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh.” And in view of these things the apostle wrote: “Ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day.” Since we know not the hour of Christ’s coming, we must live soberly and godly in this present world, “Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.” –*Reflecting Christ*, p. 258.

But the day and the hour of His coming Christ has not revealed. He stated plainly to His disciples that He Himself could not make known the day or the hour of His second appearing. Had He been at liberty to reveal this, why need He have exhorted them to maintain an attitude of constant expectancy? There are those who claim to know the very day and hour of our Lord’s appearing. Very earnest are they in mapping out the future. But the Lord has warned them off the ground they occupy. The exact time of the second coming of the Son of man is God’s mystery. –*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 632, 633.

Signs of the times

“The ruin of Jerusalem was a symbol of the final ruin that shall overwhelm the world. The prophecies that received a partial fulfillment in the overthrow of

Jerusalem have a more direct application to the last days. We are now standing on the threshold of great and solemn events. A crisis is before us, such as the world has never witnessed. And sweetly to us, as to the first disciples, comes the assurance that God’s kingdom ruleth over all. The program of coming events is in the hands of our Maker. The Majesty of heaven has the destiny of nations, as well as the concerns of His church, in His own charge. –*Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, pp. 120, 121.

We should be awake to discern the signs of the times, and to give warning to the people. There are many in the world who seek to quiet the alarm of the people, who say, “Peace, peace; when there is no peace;” but we should take an opposite course from this. There are many who say to the aroused people, “Do not disturb yourselves, go on in godlessness, go on glorifying yourselves, and living in pleasure. The day of the Lord is not at hand.” Did not Christ have an object in view when He said, “Behold, I come quickly”? Did He not see that His church would need to keep this solemn event in mind? Shall we say with the last-day scoffers, “Where is the promise of His coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation”? I do not mean to be with this class. I mean to arouse men with the message of Christ’s near coming. –*The Signs of the Times*, June 24, 1889.

The need to be prepared

Paul speaks of a class to whom the Lord’s appearing will come unawares. “The day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them,... and they shall not escape.” But he adds, to those who have given heed to the Saviour’s warning: “Ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we

are not of the night, nor of darkness." 1 Thessalonians 5:2-5. —*The Great Controversy*, p. 371.

I have questioned in my mind as I have seen men and women hurrying to and fro on matters of business or pleasure, whether or not they ever thought of the day of God, that is about to break upon us. We need not be in darkness as to what is coming on the earth. We cannot afford to meet that day without a preparation, and light has been given us from Heaven, that we may understand the requirements of God. "Search the Scriptures" is the command of Christ. "Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation." There is a witness that follows us in all our actions of life. Our very thoughts and the intents and purposes of our hearts are laid bare to His inspection. As the features are produced upon the polished plate of the artist, so are our characters delineated upon the books of record in heaven. Are you fitting up in the graces of Christ? Will your robe of character be white and spotless in the day of His appearing? Every interest should be shaped, and every action directed toward this all-important event. We should live daily in great humility before God, seeking the divine strength lest we fail of His grace and prove ourselves unworthy of eternal life. We should be "looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." —*Signs of the Times*, December 29, 1887.

The Lord is soon to come, and we must be prepared to meet Him in peace. Let us be determined to do all in our power to impart light to those around us. We are not to be sad, but cheerful, and we are to keep the Lord Jesus ever before us. He is soon coming, and we must be ready and waiting for His appearing. Oh, how glorious it will be to see Him and be welcomed as His redeemed ones! Long have we waited, but our hope is not to grow dim. —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, p. 253.

What are you doing, brethren, in the great work of preparation? Those who are uniting with the world are receiving the worldly mold and preparing for the mark of the beast. Those who are distrustful of self, who are humbling

themselves before God and purifying their souls by obeying the truth—these are receiving the heavenly mold and preparing for the seal of God in their foreheads. When the decree goes forth and the stamp is impressed, their character will remain pure and spotless for eternity.

Now is the time to prepare. The seal of God will never be placed upon the forehead of an impure man or woman. It will never be placed upon the forehead of the ambitious, world-loving man or woman. It will never be placed upon the forehead of men or women of false tongues or deceitful hearts. All who receive the seal must be without spot before God—candidates for heaven. —*Maranatha*, p. 240.

Do not procrastinate

Everything in the world is in agitation. The signs of the times are ominous. Coming events cast their shadows before. The Spirit of God is withdrawing from the earth, and calamity follows calamity by sea and by land. There are tempests, earthquakes, fires, floods, murders of every grade. Who can read the future? Where is security? There is assurance in nothing that is human or earthly. Rapidly are men ranging themselves under the banner they have chosen. Restlessly are they waiting and watching the movements of their leaders. There are those who are waiting and watching and working for our Lord's appearing. Another class are falling into line under the generalship of the first great apostate. Few believe with heart and soul that we have a hell to shun and a heaven to win. —*The Desire of Ages*, p. 636.

To the early church the hope of Christ's coming was a blessed hope, and they were represented by the apostle as waiting for His Son from heaven, as loving His appearing. As long as this hope was cherished by the professed followers of Christ, they were a light to the world. But it was not the design of Satan that they should be a light to the world; and because iniquity abounded, the love of many waxed cold, and the unfaithful servant is represented as saying, "My Lord delayeth his coming." As a result of loss of faith in the appearing of Jesus, the unfaithful servant begins to smite his fellow servant, and to eat and drink with the drunken. Satan was at work to cause apostasy in

the early church; and in accomplishing his purpose, doctrines were introduced through which the church was leavened with unbelief in Christ and His coming. The adversary of God and man cast his hellish shadow athwart the path of the believers, and dimmed their star of hope, even their faith in the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ. —(*Review and Herald*, November 22, 1892) *The 1888 Ellen G. White Materials*, p. 1073.

Do not be misled

The world, full of rioting, full of godless pleasure, is asleep, asleep in carnal security. Men are putting afar off the coming of the Lord. They laugh at warnings. The proud boast is made, "All things continue as they were from the beginning." "Tomorrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant." 2 Peter 3:4; Isaiah 56:12. We will go deeper into pleasure loving. But Christ says, "Behold, I come as a thief." Revelation 16:15. At the very time when the world is asking in scorn, "Where is the promise of His coming?" the signs are fulfilling. While they cry, "Peace and safety," sudden destruction is coming. When the scorner, the rejecter of truth, has become presumptuous; when the routine of work in the various money-making lines is carried on without regard to principle; when the student is eagerly seeking knowledge of everything but his Bible, Christ comes as a thief. —*The Desire of Ages*, p. 635.

"Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; Who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." Titus 2:13, 14.

This scripture teaches a very different lesson from that which is presented in the words of many who profess to believe the gospel. We are exhorted to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world, and to look for the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ. Some have made an objection to my work, because I teach that it is our duty to be looking for Christ's personal appearing in the clouds of heaven. They have said, "You would think that the day of the Lord was right upon us to hear Mrs. White speak in reference to the coming of

Christ; and she has been preaching on that same subject for the last forty years, and the Lord has not yet come."

This very objection might have been brought against the words of Christ Himself. He said by the mouth of the beloved disciple, "Behold, I come quickly," and John responds, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus." Jesus spoke these words as words of warning and encouragement to His people; and why should we not heed them? The Lord has said that it is the faithful who will be found watching and waiting for Him. It was the unfaithful servant who said, "My Lord delayeth his coming," and began to smite his fellow servants, and eat and drink with the drunken. —*Reflecting Christ*, p. 258.

Men will continue to erect expensive buildings, costing millions of money; special attention will be called to their architectural beauty, and the firmness and solidity with which they are constructed; but the Lord has instructed me that despite the unusual firmness and expensive display, these buildings will share the fate of the temple in Jerusalem. That magnificent structure fell. Angels of God were sent to do the work of destruction, so that one stone was not left upon another that was not thrown down. — (MS 35, 1906) *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, pp. 1098, 1099.

His people are to preserve their peculiar character as His representatives. There is work for every one of them to do. The rich should bring their means, the honored their influence, the learned their wisdom, the poor their virtue, if they would be effective workers with God. They are to bring themselves into right relation with God, that they may reflect the light of the glory of God that shines in the face of Jesus Christ.... They are to warn men of the coming judgments. They are to represent Christ to the people. —(*The Signs of the Times*, June 24, 1889) *Reflecting Christ*, p. 258.

Jesus is coming soon

The coming of Christ is nearer than when we first believed. The great controversy is nearing its end. The judgments of God are in the land. They speak in solemn warning, saying: "Be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh." Matthew 24:44....

We are living in the closing scenes of this earth's history. Prophecy is fast

fulfilling. The hours of probation are fast passing. We have no time—not a moment—to lose. Let us not be found sleeping on guard. Let no one say in his heart or by his works: "My lord delayeth his coming." Let the message of Christ's soon return sound forth in earnest words of warning. Let us persuade men and women everywhere to repent and flee from the wrath to come....

The Lord is soon to come, and we must be prepared to meet Him in peace. Let us be determined to do all in our power to impart light to those around us. We are not to be sad, but cheerful, and we are to keep the Lord Jesus ever before us. He is soon coming, and we must be ready and waiting for His appearing. Oh, how glorious it will be to see Him and be welcomed as His redeemed ones! Long have we waited, but our hope is not to grow dim. If we can but see the King in His beauty we shall be forever blessed. I feel as if I must cry aloud: "Homeward bound!" We are nearing the time when Christ will come in power and great glory to take His ransomed ones to their eternal home....

Long have we waited for our Saviour's return. But nonetheless sure is the promise. Soon we shall be in our promised home. There Jesus will lead us beside the living stream flowing from the throne of God and will explain to us the dark providences through which on this earth He brought us in order to perfect our characters. There we shall behold with undimmed vision the beauties of Eden restored. Casting at the feet of the Redeemer the crowns that He has placed on our heads, and touching our golden harps, we shall fill all heaven with praise to Him that sitteth on the throne. —*Maranatha*, p. 311.

Watch and pray

The crisis is stealing gradually upon us. The sun shines in the heavens, passing over its usual round, and the heavens still declare the glory of God. Men are still eating and drinking, planting and building, marrying, and giving in marriage. Merchants are still buying and selling. Men are jostling one against another, contending for the highest place. Pleasure lovers are still crowding to theaters, horse races, gambling halls. The highest excitement prevails, yet probation's hour is fast closing, and every case is about to be eternally decided. Sa-

tan sees that his time is short. He has set all his agencies at work that men may be deceived, deluded, occupied and entranced, until the day of probation shall be ended, and the door of mercy be forever shut.

Solemnly there come to us down through the centuries the warning words of our Lord from the Mount of Olives: "Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares." "Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man." —*The Desire of Ages*, p. 636.

Let us watch for the glorious appearing

Let us keep our minds fixed upon the glorious appearing of Him "who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people zealous of good works;" and let us act every day of our life as though we believed that His coming was near at hand.

Let us open the door of our hearts, that Jesus may come in and that sin may go out. Let us forsake the evil and choose the good, remembering that "we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." All who enter the city of God will do so as conquerors. Jesus overcame; and we may overcome, if we will fight our battles in His name. —*Review and Herald*, March 16, 1886.

"Every man has a solemn work to do and he cannot trifle with his time; he cannot trifle with his privileges and his opportunities granted him. He must improve in character, in ability, according to his privileges and opportunities, to make a complete worker in the cause of God." —*This Day with God*, p. 208.

“The Beginning of Sorrows”

By Gerhard Hunger, Argentina

Jesus and His disciples had left the temple of Jerusalem and, after crossing the Kedron Valley, climbed the slope of the Mount of Olives. Reaching a certain point, a panorama of the beloved city opened up before them, with the high walls, the golden gate, and the esplanade where the magnificent temple stood and where today the golden Dome of the Rock and Al-Aqsa mosque stand. I imagine the scene vividly. As they were walking, they probably thought of the prophetic words of Jesus concerning the destruction of that magnificent temple where there would not be left one stone upon another. In their minds they associated such destruction with the end of the world. Tired from the journey, they probably sat down in the shade of an olive tree. Then Peter, John, James, and Andrew approached Jesus with their concern: “Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of Thy coming, and of the end of the world?” Matthew 24:3.

“Turning to the disciples, Christ said, ‘Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in My name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.’ Many false messiahs will appear, claiming to work miracles, and declaring that the time of the deliverance of the Jewish nation has come. These will mislead many. Christ’s words were fulfilled. Between His death and the siege of Jerusalem many false messiahs appeared. But this warning was given also to those who live in this age of the world. The same deceptions practiced prior to the destruction of Jerusalem have been practiced through the ages, and will be practiced again.” –*The Desire of Ages*, p. 628.

Dear young person, dear brother and sister, and dear friend who accepts God’s message, I would like to make a most fervent appeal to you, because it is time to seek the Lord. The great clock of God—the signs of the times—tells us that there are only seconds remaining till history’s midnight. Jesus is returning to free you from sin and pain and to give you possession of the eternal inheritance that the Saviour has prepared for you.

Enough of so much injustice! Enough of so much pain! Enough of suffering and so much evil! We want to be with Jesus and to be able to embrace our loved ones that death has snatched from us. We want to enter through the gates of New Jerusalem and arrive at our long-awaited home. Yes, the time has come; the great deceptions that seduce the world, the bloody wars and violence that continue, the financial and social crises that affect our society, the hunger and disease that so many are suffering from, and the many earthquakes shaking many parts of the world with increasing intensity are God’s clock telling us that the time has come for deliverance when God will wipe away our tears!

Let us consider in more detail some of the signs presented in Matthew 24.

Dangerous deceptions

Satan has created many religious myths—beliefs based on traditions without true Scriptural basis. For example, the belief that Sunday is the day of rest designated by God is a myth, because there is not a single text indicating that God has transferred the sanctity of the Sabbath to Sunday. Also, other beliefs, such as the immortality of the soul, baptism by sprinkling, celibacy, confession of sins to a priest, the secret rapture instead of the visible coming of Jesus, and others are part of the wine of Babylon that has made all the inhabitants of the earth drunk. Revelation 17:2.

In addition to sophisticated arguments in favor of evolution in the secular society of our time that claim there is no God, there are also false miracles in places of pilgrimage where the virgin Mary supposedly appeared, in charismatic meetings, and in churches that speak of miracles without complying with the conditions given in the Scriptures for the power of God to be manifested. Acts 5:32; John 14:15-17, 21. Spiritualism in its many forms is spreading its dangerous tentacles to deceive by the most varied means—from tribal superstitions, dubi-

ous medical practices, Freemasonry, and yoga, to Eastern esotericism and an abstruse blend of Christian beliefs.

But there are even more subtle deceptions. A cheap Christianity with a one-sided understanding of grace ignores the work of God in man, for “without holiness no one will see the Lord.” Hebrews 12:14, New International Version. God expects the fruit of love to be manifested in a reform in how we speak, act, eat, and dress, as well as in the music that we listen to, the recreation we engage in (Romans 12:1, 2), and our faithful obedience to the commandments of the law of God in times of peace or war, in adversity or in prosperity.

Ecumenism is another subtle deception in our days, and to participate in it is to fall on the enemy’s ground, for it is written of the remnant in Revelation 14:4: “These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins.” The antichrist is extending his influence and sharpening his weapons for the final crisis prophesied in the 13th chapter of Revelation. Sister Ellen G. White warns: “Let the watchmen on the walls of Zion not join with those who are making of none effect the truth as it is in Christ. Let them not join the confederacy of infidelity, popery, and Protestantism in exalting tradition above Scripture, reason above revelation, and human talent above the divine influence and the vital power of godliness.” –*The Review and Herald*, March 24, 1896.

History shows us that when Rome could not subdue the faithful defenders of the truth by means of force, it often achieved it through diplomacy.

“As all the affections and intimacies of the wife should be reserved for the husband alone from among all men, so also should the church relate to Christ. She is to keep herself for Him, as a chaste virgin forever. No alliance, courtship, ties, agreements, or commitments may exist between her and the powers of the earth.” –*El Desado de Todas las Gentes*, p. 776, Appendix.

Thus, as the people of God, we do not participate in political strife or take

up arms. Our citizenship is in heaven. Philippians 3:20. Many are the seductions in our days. Jesus warned His people with the words: "Take heed that no man deceive you." Matthew 24:4.

Nation against nation

"'And ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet.' Prior to the destruction of Jerusalem, men wrestled for the supremacy. Emperors were murdered. Those supposed to be standing next the throne were slain. There were wars and rumors of wars. 'All these things must come to pass,' said Christ, 'but the end [of the Jewish nation as a nation] is not yet. 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.'" — *The Desire of Ages*, p. 628.

The end would be very near, said Jesus, when nation shall rise against nation. This was fulfilled literally in the 20th century in World Wars I and II, which cost the lives of some 100 million people. Since 1945 there have been more than 30 wars, with millions of victims. The international tension caused by the cold war led to an accelerated arms race, as was predicted by the prophet Joel, "Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruninghooks into spears: let the weak say, I am strong." Joel 3:10. After the fall of the Berlin wall and the Soviet Union and the end of the cold war, it was believed that a time of peace would come, but "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." 1 Thessalonians 5:3.

On September 11, 2001, two hijacked airplanes crashed into the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in Manhattan, New York, United States. It has been more than a decade since the President of the United States, George W. Bush, said after that attack that nothing would be the same. Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan followed. The so-called war against terrorism has claimed some 250,000 victims. Laws that affect human rights have been passed. It is a known fact that there is a sophisticated control system and electronic espionage of all means of communication—telephone, email messages, Internet, etc. Today it is argued that

these systems are to protect the nations and their citizens from terrorism, but we know from prophecy that these restrictions will soon be applied to minorities that do not submit to the new world order. Further restrictions will include the observance of Sunday as the day of rest. But although the fury of the persecution will be unleashed against the observers of the holy Sabbath, as is related in Revelation 13, God will watch over His children. "He shall dwell on high: his place of defense shall be the fortresses of rocks: bread shall be given him; his waters shall be sure." Isaiah 33:16.

These signs should wake us up! We are accustomed to hearing the news, and it no longer seems to move us. Let's take a look at the conditions in the world, which show how prophecy is being fulfilled. We hear of bloody revolutions, uprisings, and movements in the Arab countries and North Africa. Violence increases day by day, and natural disasters occur with ever-increasing destruction.

And there shall be pestilences

The prophet Isaiah writes: "The earth mourneth and fadeth away, the world languisheth and fadeth away, the haughty people of the earth do languish. The earth also is defiled under the inhabitants thereof; because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore hath the curse devoured the earth, and they that dwell therein are desolate: therefore the inhabitants of the earth are burned, and few men left. The new wine mourneth, the vine languisheth, all the merryhearted do sigh." Isaiah 24:4-7.

Every day there are new pests (epidemics) and diseases. It seems that plants cannot bear fruit without being bombarded with pesticides, insecticides, and chemical fertilizers; animals are treated with a host of vaccines, antibiotics, and medicines. People are ill. The world has become a hospital. Cancer, diabetes, Alzheimer's disease, and other ills of our time affect a large percentage of the population. From 1981 to now more than 25 million people have died of AIDS, and there are currently more than 33 million people infected with HIV/AIDS. This scourge has spread around the world and serves as a warning against the aberrant moral promiscuity of our time.

Famines

Who would think, with there being so much wealth in the world, that hunger still exists? But it is so. A Rome newspaper reports: "Hunger and malnutrition kill 6 million children each year—a figure equal to the entire preschool population of Japan—and affect 852 million people in the world, 95 percent in developing countries, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) reported today."

Around 24,000 people die every day from hunger or hunger-related causes, while the United States alone has spent a trillion dollars in almost a decade of war in Afghanistan and Iraq, as reported by the BBC. Prophecy is being fulfilled. Jesus is coming soon to end injustice in this dying world.

Earthquakes

As I write these lines, the news reports that a new earthquake has shaken Turkey, leaving a trail of dead and homeless people. The statistics for recent years show that there now are some 31,000 earthquakes per year of which an average of 180 can be considered large earthquakes with a magnitude of 6-9.9 on the Richter scale and with thousands of victims. In 2004, earthquakes took the lives of more than 228,000 people; and in 2010, more than 320,000. The intensity and destructiveness of recent earthquakes and tsunamis speak to us, for it appears that the world is tired of the course of sin and is trembling before the coming of the Lord. The earthquake and tsunami in Japan and the nuclear disaster at Fukushima showed the vulnerability of our planet and specifically the lack of safety of nuclear power plants.

The beginning of sorrows

Economic crises, natural disasters, and other signs will intensify as the end approaches. James 5:1 says: "Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you." Man himself, with his excessive ambition for profit, contributes to the warming of the planet. "And the nations were angry, and Thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that Thou shouldest give reward unto Thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear Thy name,

small and great; and shouldest destroy them which destroy the earth." Revelation 11:18.

"The crisis is stealing gradually upon us. The sun shines in the heavens, passing over its usual round, and the heavens still declare the glory of God. Men are still eating and drinking, planting and building, marrying, and giving in marriage. Merchants are still buying and selling. Men are jostling one against another, contending for the highest place. Pleasure lovers are still crowding to theaters, horse races, gambling hells. The highest excitement prevails, yet probation's hour is fast closing, and every case is about to be eternally decided. Satan sees that his time is short. He has set all his agencies at work that men may be deceived, deluded, occupied, and entranced, until the day of probation shall be ended, and the door of mercy be forever shut. —*The Desire of Ages*, p. 636.

They shall betray one another

We need to strengthen ourselves in the faith today to be able to stand in the final crisis, for the prophecy of Matthew 24:9, 10 will be repeated: "Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for My name's sake. And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another." "All this the Christians suffered. Fathers and mothers betrayed their children. Children betrayed their parents. Friends delivered their friends up to the Sanhedrin. The persecutors wrought out their purpose by killing Stephen, James, and other Christians." —*The Desire of Ages*, p. 629.

Some professed Christians acted in a similar manner in the First and Second World Wars, delivering to prison and to martyrdom the brethren of the Reform Movement who refused to violate the law of God, who did not take up arms, and who honored the holy Sabbath. This history was written with the blood of those courageous witnesses. And today, those who are not making earnest preparation may fall on the same point in the final crisis. How painful it is to be delivered up by those who are the closest! Jesus suffered this betrayal, as mirrored by the Psalmist: "For it was not an enemy that reproached me; then I could have borne it: neither was it he that hated me that did magnify himself against me; then I would have hid myself from

him: But it was thou, a man mine equal, my guide, and mine acquaintance. We took sweet counsel together, and walked unto the house of God in company." Psalm 55:12-14. May God keep us from committing such a great evil.

The love of many shall wax cold

A recent story reflects the coldness of people today. Security surveillance in a certain city recorded a three-year-old girl crossing a street and being struck by a hit-and-run driver. Eighteen people passed by the injured girl, indifferent and without helping her, which is why a second car ran over her legs, until finally a woman went to her aid. Everyone lives for himself. Jesus foretold: "And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold." Matthew 24:12. God wants us to be a united church in which everyone loves each other sincerely. Let our children and all who attend our worship services experience the atmosphere of love. But often we are cold, selfish, and critical. Let us take seriously the reproach: "Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works." Revelation 2:4, 5. Let us not become infected with the spirit of this time. Let us show love to our neighbors and our loved ones while we still have them. Let us love our brothers and sisters in God's church.

Jesus loved us so much that He died for us. 1 John 4:19. Let us also show our love for Him and for souls who do not know God. Selfless love is capable of breaking down the barriers of prejudice so hearts will open and accept the truth. Let us show the world that Christ has transformed us and that we seek to live in unity as well as in diversity. Instead of criticizing others, let us see the good in our neighbor and do everything to inspire and encourage him.

The early rain fell on the early Christian church when "they were all with one accord in one place." Acts 2:1. "It was by the confession and forsaking of sin, by earnest prayer and consecration of themselves to God, that the early disciples prepared for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. The same work, only in greater degree, must be done now. Then the human agent had only to ask for the blessing, and wait for the Lord to perfect the work

concerning him. It is God who began the work, and He will finish His work, making man complete in Jesus Christ. But there must be no neglect of the grace represented by the former rain. Only those who are living up to the light they have, will receive greater light. Unless we are daily advancing in the exemplification of the active Christian virtues, we shall not recognize the manifestations of the Holy Spirit in the latter rain. It may be falling on hearts all around us, but we shall not discern or receive it." —*The Review and Herald*, March 2, 1897.

The signs of the times tell us that the end is very near. Increasingly more subtle deceptions, violence, wars, revolutions, and crises are shaking the world. Diseases, pestilences, famines, destructive earthquakes, and the growing lack of love are warnings telling us that the time has come when Jesus will return for His own. Therefore, "Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel." Amos 4:12. Let us make new vows of commitment and consecration to God. Let us humble ourselves in sincere confession for our frequent indifference and coldness, and let us be liberal in giving to the Lord our affections, time, talents, and resources in the coming new year, in a new chapter which Heaven grants us.

This Week of Prayer is a golden opportunity that Heaven gives us to take stock of the year that is about to pass away, to rededicate ourselves to the Lord, and to make new decisions. Time is running out, and our life can also come to an end. For some of us this may be our last Week of Prayer. We do not know; therefore, "To day if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts." Hebrews 3:15.

Dear brother and sister: Jesus wants you to feel that you are reconciled, forgiven, and a friend of His; that you may rejoice in the joy of salvation, the joy of obedience as well as the joy of service in witnessing to others of the wonderful message that has enlightened your life. Be faithful to the One who gave so much for you so that at the end of your pilgrimage you can say: "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing." 2 Timothy 4:7, 8. God grant us this in mercy. Amen.

Whoso Readeth, Let Him Understand

By John Bescec, Canada

Reading and understanding

One of the main objectives in reading is to gain an understanding. However, ask any student who is trying to learn, and he will tell you that this is often more difficult than it would seem. When it comes to reading your Bible, if you try to read it using your own knowledge, skill, and ability, you will invariably fall short of understanding the truth as it is given by God. We need the Holy Spirit to enlighten and guide us as we study the Holy Word. This has never been more important than it is today as we live in the last days of this earth's history. May the Lord help us as we seek to better understand the readings during this Week of Prayer.

Before the end

A momentous work lies before us. The words of Jesus echoing throughout the centuries have brought both thrill and fear to people living on this earth. "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come." Matthew 24:14. "The end"—what do those two words mean to you, my dear brother, my dear sister? The destiny of every soul will soon be decided. Are you ready as Christ's follower to proclaim the truth for the world to hear? There is much confusion on this earth today. There are many versions of the truth. But when it comes to the truth of salvation, there is only one true version of truth—God's version. God is in control, and He will make sure that His truth is heard by the last inhabitants of this planet.

"The truth will be proclaimed in clear, unmistakable language. As a people we must prepare the way of the Lord under the overruling guidance of the Holy Spirit. The gospel is to be given in its purity.... The message that means so much to the dwellers upon the earth will be heard and understood. Men will know what is truth." —*Testimonies for the*

Church, vol. 9, p. 96. As before the fall of Jerusalem, Paul, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit wrote that the gospel was "preached to every creature which is under heaven" (Colossians 1:23), likewise, just before Christ returns, the everlasting gospel will be proclaimed "to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people." Revelation 14:6.

This gospel message will be proclaimed, and then the end will come. "He does not say that all the world will be converted, but that this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations." —*The Desire of Ages*, p. 633.

Whoso readeth, let him understand

Daniel the prophet foretold the abomination of desolation that was to take place, and Jesus repeated these words to His followers: "When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:)" Matthew 24:15. Jesus warned His followers of what was to come very shortly. This warning applied to God's people then, and it applies to God's people living in the last days. We need to be awake and alert to what is happening all around us. Are we faithfully reading our Bibles? Do we see God's messages of warning being fulfilled? For the early disciples and followers of Jesus, they knew and believed that "When the idolatrous standards of the Romans should be set up in the holy ground, which extended some furlongs outside the city walls, then the followers of Christ were to find safety in flight." —*The Great Controversy*, p. 26. As the events that were prophesied to occur before the end of the world draw nearer and are in reality being fulfilled around us, should we not understand clearly what has been written as a warning to us? Unmistakable signs will take place before the end comes, but will we recognize them and understand them when they do occur? How well do we know what the last day

events are and what we are to do when some of these events take place?

"Ministers and people declared that the prophecies of Daniel and the Revelation were incomprehensible mysteries. But Christ directed His disciples to the words of the prophet Daniel concerning events to take place in their time.... And the assertion that the Revelation is a mystery, not to be understood, is contradicted by the very title of the book: 'The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto Him, to show unto His servants things which must shortly come to pass.'" —*The Great Controversy*, p. 341. What is to come on this earth very soon is not a secret; it will be known by Christ's followers and will be proclaimed in the world for all to hear.

A time to flee

For some of us living today, the idea of having to flee might be something strange, while for others it may be something that they have actually already experienced in their lifetime. The fleeing that God's people will experience in the end time will be similar to that which the early Christians experienced during the time of the Roman invasion. Christ's followers' only safety will be in fleeing. "Then let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains; Let him which is on the housetop not come down to take any thing out of his house; Neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes." Matthew 24:16-18.

There is great urgency in these words. There is an immediate call to action. There can be no delay or hesitation here. It is a call to Christ's followers to flee in order to escape the destruction that is coming. But with these warnings also comes good news. We can read what happened to the early Christians when they understood the signs and acted on them. "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.... God's merciful providence was directing

events for the good of His own people. The promised sign had been given to the waiting Christians." —*The Great Controversy* (1888), p. 31. As the Romans armies pulled back from Jerusalem for a short time, the way of escape was made possible for God's people. However, those who remained suffered some of the worst horrors that have been recorded in this earth's history. However terrible those events were, what awaits the inhabitants of this earth before Jesus returns will far exceed the horrors of the destruction of Jerusalem. Satan will no longer be restrained, and he will provoke the fiercest passions of mankind upon one another.

Woe to them

God's people will not be unaffected by the hardships and difficulties that will fall upon the inhabitants of the earth. They will be fleeing to save their lives from the coming destruction. It will be extremely trying for adults, but how much more difficult it will be for those who are pregnant and for those who have young children and babies. Jesus says about them: "And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days!" Matthew 24:19. "Anguish," "grief," "affliction," "distress," "misery," and "despair" are all words that carry similar meanings to the word "woe." As Christ's followers, are we paying attention to this particular warning? Are we reading, and are we understanding how we could be placing ourselves in even more difficulties for the times that are to come upon the world and us?

Pray

Brothers and sisters, we need to pray. We need to pray with as fervent zeal as did Christ's early followers. Jesus said, "But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the Sabbath day." Matthew 24:20. Winters in Jerusalem, Judea, and the surrounding areas were not as severe as they are in some of the northern and very southern latitudes. Yet Jesus knows the added hardships and difficulties that His followers will experience if they have to flee in the winter. He therefore urges us to pray so that we do not have to flee in seasons that would make life even more unbearable. In addition to this, the sanctity of the Sabbath is to be maintained, and we are to pray that our flight not be on the Sabbath day. Our responsibility and

our duty are to pray. What may appear in our eyes to be impossible is not impossible with God. In early Christian history, "in accordance with His instruction, the followers of Christ were enabled to depart from the besieged city, and escape to the mountains, not taking their flight either in the winter, nor upon the Sabbath day." —*Signs of the Times*, November 2, 1894. The same privilege is extended to Christ's followers in the last days if they pray according to His will.

Then shall be great tribulation

We read of the terrible atrocities that were committed upon the Jewish nation by the Romans when Jerusalem was overtaken and of the persecution of the early Christians and God's people throughout the ages. However terrible that was, the tribulations of the last days will be even worse. "For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be." Matthew 24:21. The earthquakes, floods, tsunamis, and hurricanes; the unrest that is increasing in many parts of our world; the financial instability with warnings of global economic collapse—these are but small forerunners of what is to come. These are all early warnings for us to awake out of our sleep and get ready for what is shortly going to fall upon this earth and its inhabitants.

The seven last plagues will be poured out on this earth, and the powers of heaven will be shaken. Are we prepared? Have we performed our duty in warning others about what is to come? How is our faith, and will it be able to withstand these events and the time of Jacob's trouble? The Spirit of prophecy tells us: "... They have passed through the time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation; they have endured the anguish of the time of Jacob's trouble; they have stood without an intercessor through the final outpouring of God's judgments." —*The Great Controversy*, p. 649. God's people will be tried as never before, and that is why these warnings are so important. Dear brother, dear sister, are you preparing daily for what is to come?

Except those days be shortened

In His great mercy, God shortened the previous days of tribulation for His followers. "And except those days should be

shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened." Matthew 24:22. Looking back in history, millions of faithful witnesses gave up their lives for their Lord, and "had not God's hand been stretched out to preserve His people, all would have perished." —*The Desire of Ages*, p. 630. God is in control of this world's events and of all the events that are yet to come. For the wicked there will be no safety, no place to hide. Our only safety will be in Him. The psalmist says: "He shall cover thee with His feathers, and under His wings shalt thou trust." Psalm 91:4. May we be fully on the Lord's side, place our entire trust in Him, and believe that whatever comes, our God will take care of us. Let us also pray that the coming days of tribulation will be shortened in His mercy, according to His will.

False christs, signs, and wonders

God's people will be tested. Our faith will be tried as never before. Will we by faith be able to hold firmly to the truth as it is written in the Scriptures? "Everything that can be shaken will be shaken." —*The Colporteur Evangelist*, p. 102. Will our faith be strong enough to resist believing the impersonations, the smooth words, and the false miracles that will be brought by the enemy? "Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. For there shall arise false christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect." Matthew 24:23-24. One who is not firmly grounded on a "Thus saith the Lord" will be deceived. We need to keep in mind that Satan is seeking to destroy God's remnant people. The world is already his, and he is therefore putting forward his utmost effort to deceive those who have not yielded their allegiance to God.

False messiahs have arisen throughout history and have been successful in deceiving millions of people. Many have fallen by the wayside because they did not read and understand for themselves what the Scriptures declared to be the truth. Will it be any different in the end days? God's truth has not changed, nor will it change. But how strong will your faith be when you see imposters performing miracles in the name of Christ? Will you try to rely on your senses, on what you see and hear, or will you

rely on your faith and a "Thus saith the Lord"?

The apostle John counsels us: "Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time." 1 John 2:18. Deceivers will come, performing the work of the enemy and having the sole intent to deceive those who are seeking salvation. Our only safety will be in having a genuine love for the truth and holding fast to it regardless of what may come.

Behold, I have told you before

The words of Jesus, "Behold, I have told you before" (Matthew 24:25), remind us that we should not be surprised by the things that are still to come. Delusions will come, but Jesus has warned us well in advance of these things before they happen. We have been warned so we are not caught unawares and deceived.

In order to prepare, however, we must know for ourselves what it is that we are to prepare for and how we are to do it. The Scriptures and the Spirit of prophecy tell us what we need to know today so we can be ready. It rests upon us to read, to know, and to understand what we read. Being unprepared will not be a valid excuse for us, since we have been given the time today to prepare. My fellow brothers and sisters in the Lord, let us delay no longer.

"There is great need that our weakening faith should be quickened, and that we should ever keep before the mind the evidences that our Lord is soon coming, that we may ever be found not only waiting, but watching and working." —*Review and Herald*, November 22, 1892. We need our knowledge and faith to be strengthened, and we need to be actively working to hasten the soon coming of our Lord. Much remains to be done. I pray that we each may come to a realization of our duty and our high calling. May we be willing instruments in the Lord's hands to do our part in bringing the last saving message to the last generation living on this earth. This is my prayer for each reader. Also, as we read, let us remember the words written by the apostle John: "Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things that are written therein: for the time is at hand." Revelation 1:3. May the Lord richly bless you all during this Week of Prayer. Amen.

Reading 4 – Tuesday, December 11, 2012

"When Ye Shall See All These Things"

By Francesco Caputo, Italy

Dear brothers and sisters, dear friends, and dear readers, I wish to share with you this prayer reading that has as a common thread the signs of the times that precede the second coming of Christ. The subject for our consideration is found in the verses of the gospel of Matthew 24:29-36:

"Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He shall send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh: So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors. Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away. But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but My Father only."

The Spirit of prophecy writes: "Jesus did not answer His disciples by taking up separately the destruction of Jerusalem and the great day of His coming. He mingled the description of these two events. Had He opened to His disciples future events as He beheld them, they would have been unable to endure the sight. In mercy to them He blended the description of the two great crises, leaving the disciples to study out the meaning for themselves." —*The Desire of Ages*, p. 628.

The previous verses describe the following events:

1. The tribulation of those days;
2. The darkening of the sun;

3. The falling of the stars;
4. The shaking of the powers of the heavens;
5. The mourning of the tribes of the earth;
6. The resurrection and ascension of the redeemed;
7. The appearance and return of Christ.

Jesus calls on His believers to learn from nature a parable of the fig tree, adding that this generation will not pass, that heaven and earth will pass away but His words will not, and, finally, that the day and the time of His second coming are not known.

We shall now develop our reading, clarifying and explaining each part in detail.

A time of great tribulation

The first point, that of the anguish or tribulation of those days, refers to the darkest period of the Christian era, A.D. 538 to 1798, a time of absolute papal supremacy, when millions and millions of Christians were martyred.

We read in *The Great Controversy*: "In the thirteenth century was established that most terrible of all the engines of the papacy—the Inquisition. The prince of darkness wrought with the leaders of the papal hierarchy. In their secret councils, Satan and his angels controlled the minds of evil men, while unseen in the midst stood an angel of God, taking the fearful record of their iniquitous decrees, and writing the history of deeds too horrible to appear to human eyes. 'Babylon the great' was 'drunken with the blood of the saints.' The mangled forms of millions of martyrs cried to God for vengeance upon that apostate power." —*The Great Controversy*, pp. 59, 60.

Darkening of the sun

Taking references always from the Spirit of prophecy, we read: "At the close of the great papal persecution, Christ declared, the sun should be darkened,

and the moon should not give her light. Next, the stars should fall from heaven." –*The Desire of Ages*, p. 632.

Eighteen years before the end of the papal supremacy, in 1780, there occurred in the heavens one of the unexplained signs—the darkening of the sun. The newspapers of the time recounted the event as follows: "'Almost, if not altogether, alone, as the most mysterious and as yet unexplained phenomenon of its kind,... stands the dark day of May 19, 1780—a most unaccountable darkening of the whole visible heavens and atmosphere in New England.' –R.M. Devens, *Our First Century*, p. 89.

"An eyewitness living in Massachusetts describes the event as follows: 'In the morning the sun rose clear, but was soon overcast. The clouds became lowery, and from them, black and ominous, as they soon appeared, lightning flashed, thunder rolled, and a little rain fell. Toward nine o'clock, the clouds became thinner, and assumed a brassy or coppery appearance, and earth, rocks, trees, buildings, water, and persons were changed by this strange, unearthly light. A few minutes later, a heavy black cloud spread over the entire sky except a narrow rim at the horizon, and it was as dark as it usually is at nine o'clock on a summer evening....

"'Fear, anxiety, and awe gradually filled the minds of the people. Women stood at the door, looking out upon the dark landscape; men returned from their labor in the fields; the carpenter left his tools, the blacksmith his forge, the tradesman his counter. Schools were dismissed, and tremblingly the children fled homeward. Travelers put up at the nearest farmhouse. 'What is coming?' queried every lip and heart. It seemed as if a hurricane was about to dash across the land, or as if it was the day of the consummation of all things.

"'Candles were used; and hearth fires shone as brightly as on a moonless evening in autumn.... Fowls retired to their roosts and went to sleep, cattle gathered at the pasture bars and lowed, frogs peeped, birds sang their evening songs, and bats flew about. But the human knew that night had not come....

"'Dr. Nathanael Whittaker, pastor of the Tabernacle church in Salem, held religious services in the meetinghouse, and preached a sermon in which he maintained that the darkness

was supernatural. Congregations came together in many other places. The texts for the extemporaneous sermons were invariably those that seemed to indicate that the darkness was consonant with Scriptural prophecy.... The darkness was most dense shortly after eleven o'clock.' –*The Essex Antiquarian*, April 1899, vol. 3, no. 4, pp. 53, 54. 'In most parts of the country it was so great in the daytime, that the people could not tell the hour by either watch or clock, nor dine, nor manage their domestic business, without the light of candles....

"'The extent of this darkness was extraordinary. It was observed as far east as Falmouth. To the westward it reached to the farthest part of Connecticut, and to Albany. To the southward, it was observed along the seacoasts; and to the north as far as the American settlements extend.' –William Gordon, *History of the Rise, Progress, and Establishment of the Independence of the U.S.A.*, vol. 3, p. 57.

"The intense darkness of the day was succeeded, an hour or two before evening, by a partially clear sky, and the sun appeared, though it was still obscured by the black, heavy mist. 'After sundown, the clouds came again overhead, and it grew dark very fast.' 'Nor was the darkness of the night less uncommon and terrifying than that of the day; notwithstanding there was almost a full moon, no object was discernible but by the help of some artificial light, which, when seen from the neighboring houses and other places at a distance, appeared through a kind of Egyptian darkness which seemed almost impervious to the rays.' –Isaiah Thomas, *Massachusetts Spy; or, American Oracle of Liberty*, vol. 10, no. 472 (May 25, 1780). Said an eyewitness of the scene: 'I could not help conceiving at the time, that if every luminous body in the universe had been shrouded in impenetrable shades, or struck out of existence, the darkness could not have been more complete.' –Letter by Dr. Samuel Tenney, of Exeter, New Hampshire, December 1785 (in *Massachusetts Historical Society Collections*, 1792, 1st series, vol. 1, p. 97). Though at nine o'clock that night the moon rose to the full, 'it had not the least effect to dispel the deathlike shadows.' After midnight the darkness disappeared, and the moon, when first visible, had the appearance of blood.

"May 19, 1780, stands in history as 'The Dark Day.'" –*The Great Controversy*, pp. 306-308.

Many centuries before, inspired by God, the prophet Joel had prophesied this event with the following words: "The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the Lord come." Joel 2:31.

The falling of the stars

Not many years passed before another extraordinary sign was fulfilled—the falling of the stars—a phenomenon that had occurred also in the past; but what happened in 1833 was extraordinary and unique in its kind. The Spirit of prophecy presents a detailed description of the event:

"In 1833, two years after Miller began to present in public the evidences of Christ's soon coming, the last of the signs appeared which were promised by the Saviour as tokens of His second advent. Said Jesus: 'The stars shall fall from heaven.' Matthew 24:29. And John in the Revelation declared, as he beheld in vision the scenes that should herald the day of God: 'The stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind.' Revelation 6:13. This prophecy received a striking and impressive fulfillment in the great meteoric shower of November 13, 1833. That was the most extensive and wonderful display of falling stars which has ever been recorded; 'the whole firmament, over all the United States, being then, for hours, in fiery commotion! No celestial phenomenon has ever occurred in this country, since its first settlement, which was viewed with such intense admiration by one class in the community, or with so much dread and alarm by another.' 'Its sublimity and awful beauty still linger in many minds.... Never did rain fall much thicker than the meteors fell toward the earth; east, west, north, and south, it was the same. In a word, the whole heavens seemed in motion.... The display, as described in Professor Silliman's *Journal*, was seen all over North America.... From two o'clock until broad daylight, the sky being perfectly serene and cloudless, an incessant play of dazzlingly brilliant luminosities was kept up in the whole heavens.' –R.M. Devens, *American Prog-*

ress; or, *The Great Events of the Greatest Century*, ch. 28, pars. 1-5.

“No language, indeed, can come up to the splendor of that magnificent display;... no one who did not witness it can form an adequate conception of its glory. It seemed as if the whole starry heavens had congregated at one point near the zenith, and were simultaneously shooting forth, with the velocity of lightning, to every part of the horizon; and yet they were not exhausted—thousands swiftly followed in the tracks of thousands, as if created for the occasion.” —F. Reed, in the *Christian Advocate and Journal*, December 13, 1833. ‘A more correct picture of a fig tree casting its figs when blown by a mighty wind, it was not possible to behold.’ —‘The Old Countryman,’ in *Portland Evening Advertiser*, November 26, 1833.

“In the *New York Journal of Commerce* of November 14, 1833, appeared a long article regarding this wonderful phenomenon, containing this statement: ‘No philosopher or scholar has told or recorded an event, I suppose, like that of yesterday morning. A prophet eighteen hundred years ago foretold it exactly, if we will be at the trouble of understanding stars falling to mean falling stars,... in the only sense in which it is possible to be literally true.’” —*The Great Controversy*, pp. 333, 334.

Once again the Lord in His mercy wanted to help human beings look to the heavens to understand another event that was fulfilled a little later—the passage of Jesus from the holy place to the most holy place of the heavenly sanctuary. We human beings are all too prone to cling to earthly things that we see, thus falling into the deepest delusion and disappointment. Wasn’t this exactly what happened to Miller and all the others in 1844?

Shaking of the powers of the heavens

The fourth point presents the powers of the heavens as being shaken, but in what sense? What was Jesus saying with these words?

Sister White states: “The powers of heaven are the sun, moon, and stars. They rule in the heavens. The powers of earth are those that rule on the earth. The powers of heaven will be shaken at the voice of God. Then the sun, moon, and stars will be moved out of their places. They will not pass away, but be shaken by the voice of God.

“Dark heavy clouds came up, and clashed against each other. The atmosphere parted and rolled back; then we could look up through the open space in Orion, whence came the voice of God. The holy city will come down through that open space. I saw that the powers of earth are now being shaken, and that events come in order. War, and rumors of war, sword, famine, and pestilence are first to shake the powers of earth, then the voice of God will shake the sun, moon, and stars, and this earth also.” —*Early Writings*, p. 41.

The mourning of the tribes of the earth

For the fifth point we will consider the mourning of the nations (tribes of the earth). Generally one cries when something sad and terrible happens in life, such as when one of us or our loved ones is affected by a terrible illness, or, worse yet, when death visits our family. How many of us have witnessed heartrending scenes, laments, moans, and cries of despair, feeling our hearts tighten and tears run down our face. We wanted to do something—something useful and helpful—but we have had to realize our inability. Paralyzed, motionless, and silent, we waited for something to happen that would in an instant heal the sick or revive the dead. Time passed, but nothing changed; and this will be repeated when the time of mercy ends and the seven last plagues begin to fall upon the earth, one after another, destroying everything—plants, animals, houses, and people. No one will be able to stop the wrath of God against impenitent men, and all nations will weep in total despair; there will be no more mercy of God to alleviate their suffering or to allay their fears. Then there will be no more hope for the wicked; there will be hope only for those who trusted in God.

Resurrection and translation of the redeemed

In the sixth point, we will consider the resurrection and translation of the redeemed. I remember how in my childhood I often awoke with tears in my eyes, asking myself, Why was I born? Why must I die? Will there be something after death? Will I see my loved ones? What will happen? And there were oth-

er questions. I give thanks to God, who has revealed Himself in my life and has answered all my questions through His word. Reading it, I have found the joy and hope of the resurrection and eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. We as believers are waiting to hear the sound of the trumpet and the voice of God that will call to life the redeemed ones, as the apostle Paul writes:

“But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.” 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.

In these verses, we find two teachings—the resurrection of the just and the translation of all the redeemed, from Adam to the last sealed soul. On their faces there will be no traces of despair and pain, rather there will be a radiant glow with the glory of God and Jesus Christ our Lord.

Christ's second coming

For the seventh and last point, we will consider the second coming of Christ. Throughout history this event has been the dominant theme of every believer and the blessed hope of every Christian. Unfortunately, many have tried to set dates for this greatest of all events, not taking into account the entire prophetic picture described in the Bible. In doing so, they created problems for themselves and for all who trusted them. Jesus affirmed in His Word that “of that day and hour knoweth no man” but at the same time gave the signs that would precede His appearing. We live in the intervening phase, because all the signs have been fulfilled in the social, spiritual, and economic realms. See 2 Timothy 3:1-5. We have only to wait for the fulfillment of

what will happen in the heavens, which will be rolled up like a scroll (Revelation 6:14) to make room for the appearing of Christ, which will be audible, visible, glorious, tangible, and universal.

Dear brothers and sisters, we are living in the most serious moment of our world's history; the signs of the times have spoken and continue to speak. Do we understand them correctly? Do we want to prepare for entrance into the heavenly kingdom? Do we want to be translated to meet the Lord in the air? Do we want to see Jesus come? As we go forward, two classes will be distinguished more and more, and both are preparing to cry aloud. Of the followers of Cain it is prophesied: "And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: For the great day of His wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?" "And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us: this is the Lord; we have waited for Him, we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation." Revelation 6:15-17; Isaiah 25:9.

Dear brother, dear sister, dear friend, the choice is yours; you will determine your destiny. Christ for His part has done everything for you. What are you willing to do for Him? What do you want to do for your neighbor? What are you ready to do for yourself? Your destiny depends on your decision. Choose life eternal! Amen.

"The transforming power of Christ's grace molds the one who gives himself to God's service. Imbued with the Spirit of the Redeemer, he is ready to deny self, ready to take up the cross, ready to make any sacrifice for the Master.... He realizes that every part of his being belongs to Christ, who has redeemed him from the slavery of sin; that every moment of his future has been bought with the precious lifeblood of God's only-begotten Son." —*God's Amazing Grace*, p. 236.

As in the Days of Noah

By Danilo L. Monterroso, Guatemala

The Redeemer of the world sees clearly the state of society today. The primary focus is pleasure—eating, drinking, and sins that condemn this generation. When He was on earth, He said that the last days before His second coming would be as it was in the days of Noah. "... They were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away:..." Matthew 24:38, 39. The same state of things exists now, and those who believe these warnings will not behave in ways that place them under condemnation.

Eating and drinking

As God's people, we must lift up the principles of health reform, for we live in a time when intemperance is taking its toll on millions and millions of lives each day. We must sound the alarm, as did Noah, for intemperance made it impossible for the antediluvians to understand the message that God gave to Noah. The inspired writings tell of the terrible results of intemperance: "Those who eat and work intemperately and irrationally, talk and act irrationally. It is not necessary to drink alcoholic liquors in order to be intemperate. The sin of intemperate eating—eating too frequently, too much, and of rich, unwholesome food—destroys the healthy action of the digestive organs, affects the brain, and perverts the judgment, preventing rational, calm, healthy thinking and acting." —*Christian Temperance and Bible Hygiene*, p. 155.

Christ began the work of redemption on the very spot where ruin had begun. The fall of our first parents and the destruction of the antediluvians and the cities of the plain were due to the indulgence of appetite.

Through intemperance, Satan works to destroy the mental and moral faculties that God gave man as a priceless gift. Thus it becomes impossible for men to appreciate the things of eternal

value. Through pleasing the senses, Satan tries to erase from the soul all traces of the divine likeness. Christ declares that the condition of the world will be as it was in the days before the flood and in the days of Sodom and Gomorrah. The thoughts of the heart are evil continually. We are living on the very eve of His coming, and the lesson of the Saviour's forty-day fast should be recorded in our hearts. Only by inexpressible anguish did Christ endure, showing the great evil of unchecked appetite. His example shows that our only hope of eternal life is to keep appetite and passion under submission to the will of God.

"Gluttony and intemperance lie at the foundation of the great moral depravity in our world. Satan is aware of this and he is constantly tempting men and women to indulge the taste at the expense of health and even life itself. Eating, drinking, and dressing are made the aim of life with the world. Just such a state of things existed before the flood. And this state of dissipation is one of the marked evidences of the soon close of this earth's history." —(Letter 34, 1875)

"The picture which Inspiration has given of the antediluvian world represents too truly the condition to which modern society is fast hastening." —(*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 102) *Last Day Events*, p. 22.

Marrying and giving in marriage

"For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark." Matthew 24: 38.

Marriage was part of God's plan and was one of the first institutions that He established. He gave special instructions for this institution, covering it with holiness and beauty; but these instructions were forgotten, and marriage was perverted in the service of human passion. The men who lived at that time had many wives, which was contrary to the wise provision of God.

In the beginning, God gave Adam a wife, showing to all who would live in the land what His will and law were in this regard. Adam and Eve's transgression and fall brought sin and misery upon the human race, and man followed his own lusts, changing the order of God. The more men multiplied wives, the more their wickedness and misery increased. If a man wanted to take the wives, livestock, or anything else that belonged to his neighbor, he disregarded righteousness and law. If he could prevail over his neighbor by force or by killing him, he did so and rejoiced in acts of violence. The people enjoyed destroying the lives of animals and using them for food. This increased their ferocious, violent natures and made them shed the blood of humans with surprising indifference. —*Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 3, pp. 63, 64.

"The descendants of Seth were called the sons of God; the descendants of Cain, the sons of men. As the sons of God mingled with the sons of men, they became corrupt and, by intermarriage with them, lost, through the influence of their wives, their peculiar, holy character, and united with the sons of Cain in their idolatry. Many cast aside the fear of God and trampled upon His commandments. But there were a few that did righteousness, who feared and honored their Creator. Noah and his family were among the righteous few." —*The Story of Redemption*, p. 62.

"Polygamy was practiced at an early date. It was one of the sins that brought the wrath of God upon the antediluvian world.... It was Satan's studied effort to pervert the marriage institution, to weaken its obligations and lessen its sacredness; for in no surer way could he deface the image of God in man and open the door to misery and vice." —*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 338.

Encouraging divorce

What is lawful in itself is carried to excess, and sexual depravity is spreading like a pandemic throughout the world today. Countries which in past decades were opposed to divorce now approve it, and it is sad to see that there are religions that support it as well. But the church of God does not accept divorce. We read in Malachi 2:16: "For the Lord, the God of Israel, saith that He hateth putting away [divorce]; for one cov-

ereth violence with his garment, saith the Lord of hosts: therefore take heed to your spirit, that ye deal not treacherously."

"The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord." "For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man." 1 Corinthians 7:39; Romans 7:2, 3.

Recent trends in the United States, described by Jeannette Lofas in her book *Stepparenting: Everything You Need to Know to Make it Work* (Citadel Press, 2004), show the reality of divorce in today's society. The rapid transformation of the family makes it clear that in the near future the social structure will change significantly. Globally, the statistics show that a couple breaks up every three minutes, and most marriage break-ups occur within the first six years after the wedding. Consequently, it is estimated that 60 percent of divorces involve children of that age or younger. Measuring the United States, where divorce is more common, we find an even harsher reality. The divorce rate in this country is 50 percent, the highest in the world—one divorce for every two marriages.

The institution of marriage has been so corrupted that even vile practices are legalized; there are laws in developed countries allowing people of the same sex to marry. In Romans 1:24-28, 32 we read: "Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence

of their error which was meet. And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind,... Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them."

Marriage between individuals of the same sex is lawful in eight countries; the Netherlands was the first to legalize it in 2001. Other countries that have approved gay marriage are Belgium, which it did in 2003; Spain and Canada, in 2005; South Africa, in 2006; Norway and Sweden, in 2009; and Iceland, in 2010. Gay marriage is also valid in some states of the U.S. Ecuador, Colombia, and Uruguay have other legal forms of homosexual unions, as do Germany, Andorra, Australia, Austria, Denmark, Slovenia, Finland, and France. Without allowing marriage, Hungary, Israel, Luxembourg, New Zealand, UK, Czech Republic, and Switzerland allow protection for such practices. It is significant to note how such laws change what God established from the beginning of creation in regard to marriage; without realizing it, nations are returning to the same situation as was dominant before the great flood of Noah's day.

God saw that the earth was full of violence

"In the days of Noah the overwhelming majority was opposed to the truth, and enamored with a tissue of falsehoods. The land was filled with violence. War, crime, murder, was the order of the day. Just so will it be before Christ's second coming." —(MS 24, 1891) *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 1090.

"The labor unions are quickly stirred to violence if their demands are not complied with. Plainer and plainer is it becoming that the inhabitants of the world are not in harmony with God. No scientific theory can explain the steady march of evil workers under the generalship of Satan. In every mob wicked angels are at work, rousing men to commit deeds of violence....

"The perversity and cruelty of men will reach such a height that God will reveal Himself in His majesty. Very soon the wickedness of the world will have reached its limit and, as in the days of Noah, God will pour out His judg-

ments.” –(*The Upward Look*, p. 334) *Last Day Events*, p. 23.

In Genesis 6:11-13 we read: “The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth. And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before Me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth.”

These clear words of Scripture show how the judgments of God will come upon the earth because of the increasing violence. Many people ask, What is the state of violence in our countries? On October 3, 2002, the World Health Organization released the first comprehensive report on violence, which is considered a worldwide public health issue. Each year, more than 1.6 million people worldwide die violently. Public health experts say these statistics are only the tip of the iceberg, since most of the violent acts are committed behind closed doors and go unrecorded. Besides deaths, millions of people are injured as a result of violence and suffer physical, sexual, reproductive, and mental injury. The report says that deaths and disabilities caused by violence make it one of the main public health problems of our time. Violence is a major cause of death for people aged 15 to 44 and is responsible for 14 percent of deaths among males and 7 percent among females. On any given day, 1,424 people are killed in acts of homicide—almost one person every minute. Roughly one person commits suicide every 40 seconds. About 35 people die every hour as a direct result of armed conflict. It is estimated that in the twentieth century, 191 million people died as a result of direct or indirect conflict, and well over half of them were civilians.

“The terrible reports we hear of murders and robberies, of railway accidents and deeds of violence, tell the story that the end of all things is at hand. Now, just now, we need to be preparing for the Lord’s second coming.” –(Letter 308, 1907) *Last Day Events*, p. 23.

The WHO report and statements of prophetic inspiration show that the world is reaching its end. Modern lifestyle amenities and advancing technology make violence more socially acceptable and effective. What is violence, and where does it appear? On television

and the Internet, in video games, sports, homes, schools, and churches, on the street, and in all areas of society. Christ said that as it was in the days of Noah, when the earth was filled with violence and corrupted by crime, so it will be when the Son of man is revealed.

“And spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly.” 2 Peter 2:5. The day is almost gone; the night is coming. We see God’s judgments on both land and sea. We are not granted a second probation. This is not a time for making wrong moves. We thank God that everyone still has a chance to make a covenant with Him. A year that is past will not return. How many were marked by the loss of a loved one, family breakdown because of sin and failure to confess, or financial loss? But we have life. There is still opportunity to seek God while He can be found. Seek Him today, my dear brother and sister. Jesus intercedes for you. He is standing at your heart’s door. Open it, for He grants full salvation. Trust Him as your Saviour.

“Before the flood God sent Noah to warn the world, that the people might be led to repentance, and thus escape the threatened destruction. As the time of Christ’s second appearing draws near, the Lord sends His servants with a warning to the world to prepare for that great event. Multitudes have been living in transgression of God’s law, and now He in mercy calls them to obey its sacred precepts. All who will put away their sins by repentance toward God and faith in Christ are offered pardon.” –*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 102.

“Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left.” “Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.” Matthew 24:40, 42.

“The righteous and the wicked will still be living upon the earth in their mortal state—men will be planting and building, eating and drinking, all unconscious that the final, irrevocable decision has been pronounced in the sanctuary above. Before the Flood, after Noah entered the ark, God shut him in and shut the ungodly out; but for seven days the people, knowing not that their doom was fixed, continued their careless, pleasure-loving life and mocked the warnings of impending judgment.

‘So,’ says the Saviour, ‘shall also the coming of the Son of man be.’ Matthew 24:39....

“In mercy to the world, God blotted out its wicked inhabitants in Noah’s time...; it is so in our time. It is in mercy to the universe that God will finally destroy the rejecters of His grace.” –*The Great Controversy*, pp. 491, 543.

“While Noah was giving his warning message to the world, his works testified of his sincerity. It was thus that his faith was perfected and made evident. He gave the world an example of believing just what God says. All that he possessed, he invested in the ark.... Every blow struck upon the ark was a witness to the people.” –*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 95.

What is your testimony at the end of another year? What is the example you are setting at home, in the church, and in your walk of life? God expects and wants us to reflect His character to others. Our personal testimony is a powerful argument for the gospel. God bless you. Amen.

“What are you doing, my fellow-Christians? Are you examining yourselves, whether ye be in the love of God? Are you day by day purifying your own souls, and obtaining a fitness for heaven? The Bible is full of practical truths that are calculated to work great changes in the human character. And Jesus prayed for His disciples: ‘Sanctify them through Thy truth; Thy word is truth.’ The word of God obeyed is the great sanctifier of hearts. Through its influence we may become pure, ‘even as He is pure.’ By forming such a character, we shall secure the truest happiness here; and when Jesus shall appear in the clouds of heaven, we shall be able to say: ‘Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us.’ ‘We will be glad and rejoice in His salvation.’ ” –*Signs of the Times*, July 21, 1887.

The Faithful and Wise Servant

By Emmanuel Chileshe, South Africa

We have come to the time when the Lord will soon repeat the words, “The end of all flesh is come before Me.” Genesis 6:13. What is awaiting the church of God in the final events? What is necessary for the church now so that it will be prepared to cross the threshold into eternity? How may we be found as faithful and wise servants?

Do we like being servants?

Centuries ago certain types of work were done only by servants or slaves. Now, as time is progressing and in some countries life conditions improve, work considered menial is slowly being abandoned. Preferring a higher level of life, tasks such as house cleaning or taking care of sick and elderly people are shunned by many, and only foreigners accept them. Not only that. In reality, how many today in any country like to belong to the class of a “servant”? If people accept such labor because of need, how many like to remain for very long in that situation? Who likes to be called “servant” and not be free?

The Jews of Jesus time completely rejected the idea of being a servant, considering it absolutely incompatible with their feelings. John 8:33. But it was not so with our Lord. Speaking to His disciples, He clearly said: “For whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? Is not he that sitteth at meat? But I am among you as he that serveth.” Luke 22:27. So, for Jesus it is no shame to be a servant, because this is the very position He chooses for Himself. If this is the case, what is His wish for us? How should we be? He invites every one of us to be one who serves. Luke 22:26.

In the parable of Matthew 24:45-51, the Lord referred to a special service in which the master set the faithful and wise servant over His household. He is not dealing with buildings, fields, plants, goods, or whatever; the servant is set over human beings, even “over his household,” and with a very essential responsibility—“to give them meat

in due season.” Matthew 24:45. What does this mean to us as people of God? How may we be blessed and bless others? First of all, the Spirit of prophecy mentions the offer of present truth to the people.

The offering of the gospel

“An infinite sacrifice has been made for man, and made in vain for every soul who will not accept the offer of salvation. How important, then, that the one who presents the truth shall do so under a full sense of the responsibility resting upon him! How tender, pitiful, and courteous should be all his conduct in dealing with the souls of men, when the Redeemer of the world has shown that he values them so highly! The question is asked by Christ, ‘Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household?’ Matthew 24:45. Jesus asks, ‘Who?’ and every minister of the gospel should repeat the question to his own heart. As he views the solemn truths, and his mind beholds the picture drawn of the faithful and wise steward, his soul should be stirred to the very depths.” —*Gospel Workers* (1892), p. 15; *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 396.

But we should not think that this mission is restricted only to ministers. We all are called to be servants—“faithful and wise” servants (Matthew 24:45)—and this involves every one of us.

“To every man is given his work; not one is excused. Each has a part to act, according to his capacity; and it devolves upon the one who presents the truth carefully and prayerfully, to learn the ability of all who accept the truth, and then to instruct them and lead them along, step by step, letting them realize the burden of responsibility resting upon them to do the work that God has for them to do. It should be urged upon them again and again, that no one will be able to resist temptation, to answer the purpose of God, and to live the life of a Christian, unless he shall take up

his work, be it great or small, and do that work with conscientious fidelity. There is something for all to do besides going to church, and listening to the word of God. They must practice the truth heard, carrying its principles into their everyday life. They must be doing work for Christ constantly, not from selfish motives, but with an eye single to the glory of Him who made every sacrifice to save them from ruin.” —*Gospel Workers* (1892), p. 15.

There is much for the faithful servant to do

“‘Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his Lord hath made ruler over His household?’ Can we answer? Am I the steward, faithful to the sacred trust which is committed to me? To every man is given an individual responsibility. The watchmen have their specific work to discern the approach of danger and sound the note of warning. The soldiers of the cross of Christ are to have ears keen to hear. In their position of responsibility they are to give the trumpet a certain sound, that everyone may gird on the armor for action.

“What work are we individually doing for the Master? Who are unfolding the truth to those who are in the darkness of error? Who are holding forth the words of life? The enemies of Christ are many, who, while they claim to be righteous, have not the righteousness of Christ. They disguise themselves as angels of light, but they are ministers of sin. This fact should be sufficient to stir every soul to action. Who are faithful stewards of the grace of Christ? Who are making wise division of labor, calling into active service every soul that has an intelligent knowledge of the truth, and giving to all a work to do?

“The outposts are to be kept guarded. There are to be men to hold the fort, while the advancing forces are engaged in active warfare. To every man is given his work. We are not to echo the words of those in error, but to inculcate ideas of

truth. Our work is to benefit our fellow-men. We are not to travel over the track of opponents to the truth, but to sound the message of the third angel, who is flying in the midst of heaven proclaiming the note of warning, the commandments of God, and the testimony of Jesus Christ." —*Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, p. 236.

Be careful not to be an unfaithful servant

When people administer a patrimony, they have a lot of value in their hands. Sometimes they are active, and the capital improves; at other times, they are not, and the master suffers great loss. In certain cases they remain faithful; in other cases, they are suspected of violation of trust and corruption. What will happen to them? What will happen to us if we adopt corrupt methods and are found to be careless?

"Those who are 'do-nothings' now will have the superscription upon them, 'Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting.' They knew their Master's will, but did it not. They had the light of truth, they had every advantage, but chose their own selfish interests, and they will be left with those whom they did not try to save. 'But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My Lord delayeth His coming; and shall begin to smite his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken; the Lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for Him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, and shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

"Let there be an earnest consideration of these words. Let none say, 'That does not mean me; I am a Christian.' Who says this, yourself or He who reads the heart? The unfaithful steward had solemn responsibilities entrusted to him; before the world he appeared as a servant of Christ; but, oh, how deplorable for himself, and for all connected with him; he is an evil servant! He is imperiling his Lord's goods. He is teaching souls to trample upon the holy law of God. He calls Christ, 'My Lord.' But he says, 'My Lord delayeth His coming.' He does not say that Christ will not come; he does not scoff at the idea of His second coming; but he tells the

people that His coming is delayed. He is removing from the minds of others the conviction that the Lord is coming quickly. His influence leads men to presumptuous, careless delay. Thus they are off their watch and they echo the words of the unfaithful watcher; still others catch them up, and the evil spirit, and men are confirmed in their worldliness and stupor. Their course is downward, not upward; they are not looking for and hasting unto the day of God. Earthly passions, corrupt thoughts, take possession of the mind....

"The evil servant smites his fellow servants who are seeking to do the will of his Lord. He eats and drinks with the drunken, those who are carnally minded, notwithstanding their profession of Christianity. They are opposed to Christ and the work He came to our world to do, which was to live the law of God in humanity, to be an example to all humanity." —*Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, pp. 237, 238.

The danger threatening the church

"Look at the picture that is drawn of the faithful and wise steward. The Lord says, 'Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his Lord hath made ruler over his household?' The Son of Man is represented as one taking a far journey, who gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work. Do we comprehend this? Do we act upon it? Do we realize that to every one of us is given a work to do? The work is not all left to those who hold official position, nor to the ministers, but to every member of the church Christ has given his work. There are to be no indolent ones; and yet how many ignore all spiritual responsibility. There are do-nothings. The pages of the book of God reveal a mournful blank. They are trees in the vineyard of the Lord, but they bear no fruit; they are cumberers of the ground.

"I was shown the danger that will threaten the church, because here and there persons will be rising up, proclaiming that they have new light. They may be those who have been regarded as humble Christians, and very conscientious in all their doings, but they do not have a good conscience. Reason and common sense are laid aside, and they become fanatical. Religious fanatics will certainly appear among us, and they will cause much care and much grief to

those who have the honor of the cause of God at heart. They will not consider it their duty to counsel with their brethren." —*General Conference Bulletin*, October 1, 1896.

"Pastors and churches are remiss in ministering, in educating faithfully the members of the church. If they are not acquainted with their duty in this respect, they need a teacher to instruct them. 'Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.' 'Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Verily I say unto you, That he shall make him ruler over all his goods.' " —*Australasian Union Conference Record*, February 25, 1907.

Watch, wait, pray, and work

The good servant is not only working; he is also longing and praying for the coming of his Lord, making every necessary spiritual preparation. The Lord illustrated this for the benefit of His people, providing a comparison with other circumstances.

"After He had given the signs of His coming, Christ said, 'When ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand.' 'Take ye heed, watch and pray.' God has always given men warning of coming judgments. Those who had faith in His message for their time, and who acted out their faith, in obedience to His commandments, escaped the judgments that fell upon the disobedient and unbelieving. The word came to Noah, 'Come thou and all thy house into the ark; for thee have I seen righteous before Me.' Noah obeyed and was saved. The message came to Lot, 'Up, get you out of this place; for the Lord will destroy this city.' Genesis 7:1; 19:14. Lot placed himself under the guardianship of the heavenly messengers, and was saved. So Christ's disciples were given warning of the destruction of Jerusalem. Those who watched for the sign of the coming ruin, and fled from the city, escaped the destruction. So now we are given warning of Christ's second coming and of the destruction to fall upon the world. Those who heed the warning will be saved.

"Because we know not the exact time of His coming, we are commanded to watch. 'Blessed are those servants, whom the Lord when He cometh shall find watching.' Luke 12:37. Those who watch for the Lord's coming are not waiting in idle expectancy. The expectation of Christ's coming is to make men fear the Lord, and fear His judgments upon transgression. It is to awaken them to the great sin of rejecting His offers of mercy. Those who are watching for the Lord are purifying their souls by obedience to the truth. With vigilant watching they combine earnest working. Because they know that the Lord is at the door, their zeal is quickened to cooperate with the divine intelligences in working for the salvation of souls. These are the faithful and wise servants who give to the Lord's household 'their portion of meat in due season.' Luke 12:42. They are declaring the truth that is now specially applicable. As Enoch, Noah, Abraham, and Moses each declared the truth for his time, so will Christ's servants now give the special warning for their generation." —*The Desire of Ages*, p. 634.

"Jesus has told His disciples to 'watch,' but not for definite time. His followers are to be in the position of those who are listening for the orders of their Captain; they are to watch, wait, pray, and work, as they approach the time for the coming of the Lord; but no one will be able to predict just when that time will come; for 'of that day and hour knoweth no man.' You will not be able to say that He will come in one, two, or five years, neither are you to put off His coming by stating that it may not be for ten or twenty years.... We are not to know the definite time either for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit or for the coming of Christ." —(*Review and Herald*, March 22, 1892) *Evangelism*, p. 221.

Just a short time for preparation and work

Continuing with this subject, the Spirit of prophecy writes: "Everything in the world is in agitation. The signs of the times are ominous. Coming events cast their shadows before. The Spirit of God is withdrawing from the earth, and calamity follows calamity by sea and by land. There are tempests, earthquakes, fires, floods, murders of every grade. Who can read the future? Where is secu-

rity? There is assurance in nothing that is human or earthly. Rapidly are men ranging themselves under the banner they have chosen. Restlessly are they waiting and watching the movements of their leaders. There are those who are waiting and watching and working for our Lord's appearing. Another class are falling into line under the generalship of the first great apostate. Few believe with heart and soul that we have a hell to shun and a heaven to win.

"The crisis is stealing gradually upon us. The sun shines in the heavens, passing over its usual round, and the heavens still declare the glory of God. Men are still eating and drinking, planting and building, marrying, and giving in marriage. Merchants are still buying and selling. Men are jostling one against another, contending for the highest place. Pleasure lovers are still crowding to theaters, horse races, gambling hells. The highest excitement prevails, yet probation's hour is fast closing, and every case is about to be eternally decided. Satan sees that his time is short. He has set all his agencies at work that men may be deceived, deluded, occupied and entranced, until the day of probation shall be ended, and the door of mercy be forever shut.

"Solemnly there come to us down through the centuries the warning words of our Lord from the Mount of Olives: 'Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares.' 'Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.' " —*The Desire of Ages*, p. 636.

Courageous and active all during life

From the day that He called us, our time in the Master's service may extend for years or even decades; nevertheless this does not make the good servant doubtful or weary but constant, like Caleb. In a moment of crisis, Caleb "wholly followed the Lord" (Numbers 32:12; see Deuteronomy 1:36) and was particularly blessed in the following years of his life, being one of the survivors who entered the promised land. Numbers 26:65. After the long pilgrimage in the desert, he was still as strong as he was in the days of Moses and just as willing to serve the

Lord. "Forty years old was I when Moses ... sent me ... to espy out the land;..." "And now, behold, the Lord hath kept me alive, as He said, these forty and five years,... lo, I am this day fourscore and five years old. As yet I am as strong this day as I was in the day that Moses sent me: as my strength was then, even so is my strength now,..." Joshua 14:7, 10, 11. So, at the age of 85, he was not tired or weak but courageous and, by faith, ready to face giants. He received power to drive them out, and so his last experience was more glorious than the former! Joshua 15:13, 14. What a great blessing if every servant of God in our days is like Caleb!

Dear brothers and sisters, the world's final events are rapidly finishing; we are approaching the end of our history, being just a step away from eternity. In view of this, the apostle Paul writes: "Knowing the time, that now it is high to awake out of sleep." Romans 13:11.

May it be our earnest petition to God during this Week of Prayer that He will help us so our life, families, and churches will be guided in accordance with the divine principles and our great Pattern. Amen.

"God has made men responsible beings, and placed them in circumstances favorable to obedience to His will. In the dignity of their God-given manhood, they are to be governed and controlled by God Himself, not by any human intelligence in our world. Man is ever to acknowledge that God lives and reigns; men are never to become lords over God's heritage. They are to consider that 'all ye are brethren.' In the very fact that men are free moral agents, God teaches us not to be forced or compelled into any course of action, also that as responsible beings in copartnership with God we are to represent God in character." —(Letter 65, 1895) *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 1098.

“Be Ye Also Ready”

By Idel Suarez, Jr., U.S.A.

“Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.” Matthew 24:44.

The Boss may come today!

World War I had started. Sir Ernest Shackleton had sailed on a ship called *Endurance* in a race to reach the South Pole on the continent of Antarctica. He met one obstacle after another. His ship had frozen and been crushed by the ice. His men ended up stranded on a small rocky island known as Elephant Island. Some got gangrene and had to have their toes surgically removed. Their food supply ran out. They were stranded and faced bitter freezing temperatures. Yet in the midst of apparent failures, Sir Shackleton came up with a plan to save all of his 28 men. He would take 5 of them with him on a tiny boat, rowing night and day across 800 miles through the planet’s roughest waters to South Georgia Island to get help and organize a rescue mission.¹ Should he fail, he would be lost at sea, and all his men would perish.

Meanwhile, 22 men were left on Elephant Island, which was covered with glacial mountains offering little of shelter or beach. The sea foamed around the bleak, rocky, forbidding place. Yet Shackleton promised to return.

Frank Wild was left in charge of the men on the island. He had a plan, and he had a slogan. He established order and a routine. Every morning all the men heard. Wild calling everyone to arise with the slogan, “Be ready. The Boss may come today!” This meant that every man had to roll up his sleeping gear, stow it, and pack it, as if they were leaving Elephant Island that morning.

Four months later, after sailing, traveling miles on foot, and then sailing again, Sir Ernest Shackleton kept his promise. On August 30, 1915, the men on Elephant Island, upon seeing a ship in the distant sea, called out, “Ship O!” That morning they let their meal burn and forgot to eat in the midst of

their cheering and hysterical celebration. Some could not speak for minutes. Shackleton came close to the shore of the island but never stepped ashore. The men ran onto the ship and left Elephant Island behind. They were ready, and the Boss did come that day!

Allegorically, we sometimes feel deserted in a lonely place and forgotten, while faced with the need to endure despite the obstacles. Beyond the glaciers and the open sea, a rescue mission is being organized by One who walked our island planet and promised to return. We are tempted to give up, to ask, “What’s the use?” Yet the Master promised to return. Today and every day, we must repeat the words, “Be ever so ready; the Lord may come today.” We need to roll up our sleeping nature and stow it away. We are to be the children of the light and not of the darkness. Wherever we may be in our spiritual journey, God has not forgotten us. Jesus lived with us on this planet. He came to find the lost. He came to seek those who are shipwrecked in sin, in the world, and in misfortune.

Oh, I want to go home with Jesus. Don’t you? Another year is about to end. God has been looking for you and sending you messages from His word, through His servants, and now through this reading. Will you also be ready to go when He comes?

“Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.” Matthew 24:44.

A thief in the night

The verse before our key text speaks of a thief and a goodman of a house. Let’s read it: “But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.” Matthew 24:43, 44.

The great English Bible Commentator, Matthew Henry, says that the thief

is death, our enemy.² It can also symbolize the coming of Christ for those who are not ready for His sudden appearing. Paul says: “For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.” 1 Thessalonians 5:2. The thief is our enemy. It is death or it is the coming of the Lord only for those who do not know Jesus as Lord and Saviour.

This parable also speaks of a house. Henry states that the house is man’s soul. We can expand on this idea and consider it a three-bedroom house—our body, mind, and spirit. All three need to be preserved for the coming of Jesus. We are responsible before God for what we feed our bodies, for the thoughts that fill our minds, and for the attitude that we carry, which influences our spirit.

The Romans divided the night into four watches. Each watch was about three hours long. The first watch started at 6 p.m., and the last watch ended at 6 a.m. At set times during the night, the Roman guards would go through the ranks and check to see that everything was safe and well. The Roman watchmen were also replaced, and new watchmen took their positions. For us, the watch symbolizes the unknown time when death can approach or the moment of Jesus’ return in glory. The watch can be seen as the four stages of life: childhood, youth, adulthood, and old age.

The thief can break into the house and break it up at any moment of the night. Death, like a thief in the night, can strike at any moment and usually knocks at the door when one least expects it. Do not be deceived into thinking that only the elderly die. Adults, youth, and children are sometimes called to rest in God’s providence. Perhaps you have lost a dear loved one recently. You know how it hurts and how that person’s memory seems to haunt us with remorse. If only I had spent a little more time with.... If only I had visited a little more often.... If only....

Jesus Himself related the word “watch” with coming death. He told

His disciples, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death: tarry ye here, and watch." Mark 14:34.

Jesus also related the word "watch" with His return. "Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come." Matthew 24:43.

Take advantage of this day. Today is the day of salvation. Today I need to spend more time with Jesus. Today I need to decide to visit His house, His church, His people, more often, not just on Sabbath, but on the other days of worship. Today we need to spend more time in His word, in prayer, in testifying for Jesus. Today we need to live life to its fullest potential in Christ. Today you can decide to avoid that "If only I had..." Why? Because after death there is no more going back. You cannot undo or finish or change what was pending. The wise Solomon said: "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest." Ecclesiastes 9:10. It is only when we realize that time is short and uncertain that we learn to measure our thoughts, words, and actions in the context of eternity. We have a hell to avoid and a heaven to gain by God's grace and by Jesus' blood.

When I was doing pastoral counseling in jails and prisons in the United States, one prisoner who had spent many years in jail for drug trafficking and murder told me what he had learned. He summarized his learning in prison with the three letters PPT. So I asked him, "What does PPT stand for?" This big muscle man who was raised as a nominal Adventist replied, "People, places and things. When I get out of prison, I need to change the people I used to hang out with, avoid the places I used to go, and stop the things I used to do." Ask yourself: What people, places, and things do I need to change to be more Christ-like? What do I need to do to be ever ready for death or Jesus' coming? Remember, only those who walk with Jesus on earth will later do so in heaven.

There is one more detail to consider in the parable Jesus told—the goodman of the house. Who is the goodman? If we look at the house as the soul, then the goodman of the house is the will. The will is the governing element of the mind. Without willing to be holy and

pure, the soul cannot become like Jesus. The will is the deciding faculty of the soul. The Bible ends by inviting us to will to be saved. The will is also essential for health of the body and the mind.

"The power of the will is not valued as it should be. Let the will be kept awake and rightly directed, and it will impart energy to the whole being and will be a wonderful aid in the maintenance of health. It is a power also in dealing with disease. Exercised in the right direction, it would control the imagination and be a potent means of resisting and overcoming disease of both mind and body. By the exercise of the will power in placing themselves in right relation to life, patients can do much to cooperate with the physician's efforts for their recovery. There are thousands who can recover health if they will. The Lord does not want them to be sick. He desires them to be well and happy, and they should make up their minds to be well." —*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 245.

The Spanish Reina Valera version uses the word "Father" instead of "goodman." The goodman is the father of the house. Every father of the home is responsible for watching over the welfare of his family and its members. He is responsible for nourishing his household, providing for their basic necessities, such as food, clothing, shelter, safety, medical care, and education, but most of all to watch for their spiritual development. He is to serve as the priest of the home, while the mother serves as the teacher of the home. The father is the head, but the mother is the heart.

"Every family is a church, over which the parents preside. The first consideration of the parents should be to work for the salvation of their children. When the father and mother as priest and teacher of the family take their position fully on the side of Christ, a good influence will be exerted in the home. And this sanctified influence will be felt in the church and will be recognized by every believer. Because of the great lack of piety and sanctification in the home, the work of God is greatly hindered. No man can bring into the church an influence that he does not exert in his home life and in his business relations." —*Child Guidance*, p. 549.

In another sense, this goodman is not only the father but also the pastor. Every pastor has the solemn responsi-

bility to provide sound Biblical teaching, preaching, healing, and counseling. He is to be an example to the flock (1 Peter 5:3) and to watch for the welfare of the spiritual lambs and sheep of the fold. Every member of the local church should be praying for their pastor and his family. They need to be lifted up to Jesus in prayer that they may represent Christ as true undershepherds. They need others in the local church to be volunteers and assist the pastor in his work for the salvation of souls.

As members, parents, and pastors, each of us needs to be ready for every good work for the glory of God. "Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work, To speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, showing all meekness unto all men." Titus 3:1, 2.

The implication is to watch and to be ready. We need a right mindset to watch and to be ready. Watching for Jesus and making ourselves ready to meet Him need to be our primary concerns and duties. Indeed, that day is approaching, whether it be our last day on earth or the first day on our celestial voyage to Jesus' home. "Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh." Matthew 24:44.

The marriage preparation

In the last book of the Bible, we find Jesus revealing His prophecy to His apostle John. He ends the long series of visions with still another parable about being ready and the urgency of preparation in the Christian life.

"Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to Him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready." "And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared [or ready] as a bride adorned for her husband." Revelation 19:7; 21:2.

Both the church and the city of the New Jerusalem are represented as a bride who makes herself ready, who prepares herself for the greatest day of her life. Jesus serves as the husband of the church and as the husband of the New Jerusalem. Why? Because the triumphant church will live in the New Jerusalem. Even as we equate the word "church" both with the group of

people as well as with the building, so God equates the word "bride" with the church and with the huge new church building known as the New Jerusalem.

"In both the Old and the New Testaments, the marriage relation is employed to represent the tender and sacred union that exists between Christ and His people. To the mind of Jesus the gladness of the wedding festivities pointed forward to the rejoicing of that day when He shall bring home His bride to the Father's house, and the redeemed with the Redeemer shall sit down to the marriage supper of the Lamb. He says, 'As the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee.' 'Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken;... but thou shalt be called My Delight;... for the Lord delighteth in thee.' 'He will rejoice over thee with joy; He will rest in His love, He will joy over thee with singing.' Isaiah 62:5, 4, margin; Zephaniah 3:17." —*The Desire of Ages*, p. 151, 1898 version.

I grew up with boys in my parents' home. Now that I am a father, I have a house full of girls. For girls, a wedding is a big thing. Boys do not dream of their wedding day like little girls do. When my little girl gets angry with one of her sisters, she will say, "I won't invite you to my wedding." That may sound funny to us, but the worst possible curse would be not to be invited to the wedding feast of the Lamb. The worst possible curse would be not to have a wedding dress for the marriage feast. The worst scenario would be to lose our bridegroom.

Think with me about all the preparation and readiness that go into a wedding. The bride must be ready to choose a bridegroom. He is to be well favored and well beloved. That is Jesus Christ, our Saviour. The apostle Paul says, "For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ." 2 Corinthians 11:2. Have you accepted Jesus as your personal Saviour and spiritual Guide?

The bride must be ready to choose a dress. The dress for the heavenly wedding is made of fine white linen. It is a symbol of the righteousness of Christ. "And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints." Revelation 19:8. Have you

claimed the righteousness of Christ by faith? Do you seek to keep it white and pure by works of mercy? We receive righteousness by faith, and it gives us strength to keep His law perfectly within our own sphere. True justification by faith is manifested in a faith that works by love.

"It was only by faith in Christ that they could secure pardon of sin and receive strength to obey God's law." —*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 524.

"This message ... presented justification through faith in the Surety; it invited the people to receive the righteousness of Christ, which is made manifest in obedience to all the commandments of God." —*Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, pp. 91, 92.

"Let perfect obedience be rendered to God through the imputed righteousness of Christ, and we shall reveal to the world the fact that God loves us as He loves Jesus." —*Signs of the Times*, May 28, 1896.

The bride must be ready to choose the bridesmaids. They must be wise and not foolish. They need to be ready to participate in the wedding ceremony when the bridegroom appears. The bridesmaids are close friends of the bride. They cannot be worldly. Let the youth especially meditate on this. We need to choose wise, not foolish, friends, because they will have an influence on our spiritual nature. The wise are those who have lamps and oil in their vessels. The lamp is the Bible, which guides their path. The oil is the Spirit of God, who anoints their thoughts. "But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps." Matthew 25:4. Do your friends love the holy Scriptures? Do they read them and carry them with them?

The bride must be ready to choose the guests for the wedding. Who have you invited to come to Jesus? Are you willing to invite whosoever will? God is no respecter of persons. It does not matter what a person's gender, education, age, ethnicity, or race is. The only determining factor is the will to come to Jesus. Are you striving to bring others to Jesus? Are you sharing the good news with everyone you meet? "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." "Blessed are they which are

called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb...." Revelation 22:17; 19:9.

The bride must be ready to choose the menu for the wedding. What menu does God want us to serve? It is the spiritual flesh and wine of Christ and His sacrifice. "She hath killed her beasts; she hath mingled her wine; she hath also furnished her table." Proverbs 9:2. Jesus is sweeter than honey, more nourishing than the heavenly manna, and more satisfying than a cup of new, unfermented wine.

As a bride prepares for her big wedding day, she counts down the days till that special day arrives. In our spiritual case, we do not know the wedding day. We do not know when the bridegroom will appear. We live in a tarrying time. We need to watch and be ever so ready in a moment's notice to meet our Maker and our Redeemer. The day will come, but we need to be ready.

Dr. Martin Luther, the great German Reformer, used to say that there were only two days on his calendar: today and that day—the day Jesus will return. Perhaps for reformers today we have three days: today, Sabbath, and that day.

The Bible says that only those who were ready went into wedding. "... The bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut." Matthew 25:10. After the door shuts, it is too late. The readiness needs to occur before the coming of the bridegroom.

"And you that have not sanctified your souls by obeying the truth, do you expect that Christ at His appearing will make you ready? There will then be no atoning blood to wash away the stains of sins. It is while it is called today that you may, if you will, hear His voice, and harden not your heart, as in the day of provocation. It is today that the Spirit of God invites. It is today that the sweet voice of mercy is falling upon your ears. It is today that the heavenly invitation comes to you. It is today that in heaven everything says, Come. 'And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And whosoever will, let him come and take of the water of life freely.'" —*The Review and Herald*, August 17, 1869.

One final story

A young man was just starting out as a pastor in London. He was talking to a retired old minister who had served

the Lord for many years. The young preacher had a question for the old pastor: "Can you give me some advice as I get ready to start my new job as a minister?"

The old preacher replied: "Yes, I can. I will give you a piece of advice. You know that in every town in England, no matter how small, in every village, though it be hidden in the folds of the mountain, near even every farmhouse, you can find a road which, if you follow it, will take you to London.

"Likewise, every text which you choose to read, study, preach, teach, or counsel from the Bible will have a path that leads to Jesus. Be sure you find that way, and follow it; be careful not to miss it once. This is my advice to you as you get ready to start your new ministry."³

Should we not all take the advice of the old preacher? Make sure every text you read in the Scriptures ends up with Jesus. Let Jesus be the omega of your life and calling. Revelation 22:13. Make sure every event in your life is related to how you can come closer to Jesus. Let Jesus be the way, the truth, and the life of your existence. John 14:6. Make sure you remember that you have received a commission to share the three angels' messages with everyone you meet in one way or another. "... For in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee." 1 Timothy 4:16.

"Are we ready to take part in the glorious work of the third angel? Are our vessels ready to receive the heavenly dew? Have we defilement and sin in the heart? If so, let us cleanse the soul temple, and prepare for the showers of the latter rain. The refreshing from the presence of the Lord will never come to hearts filled with impurity. May God help us to die to self so that Christ, the hope of glory, may be formed within!"
—*The Review and Herald*, April 21, 1891.

"Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh." Matthew 24:44. Have a blessed New Year, and may the New Year see us ready for His return. Amen.

"God's message for the inhabitants of earth today is, 'Be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.' Matthew 24:44. The conditions prevailing in society, and especially in the great cities of the nations, proclaim in thunder tones that the hour of God's judgment is come and that the end of all things earthly is at hand. 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. We are not to be surprised at this time by events both great and decisive; for the angel of mercy cannot remain much longer to shelter the impenitent.

"Behold, the Lord cometh out of His place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity: the earth also shall disclose her blood, and shall no more cover her slain.' Isaiah 26:21. The storm of God's wrath is gathering; and those only will stand who respond to the invitations of mercy, as did the inhabitants of Nineveh under the preaching of Jonah, and become sanctified through obedience to the laws of the divine Ruler. The righteous alone shall be hid with Christ in God till the desolation be overpast. Let the language of the soul be:

*"Other refuge have I none,
Hangs my helpless soul on Thee;
Leave, O, leave me not alone!
Still support and comfort me.*

*"Hide me, O my Saviour, hide!
Till the storm of life is past;
Safe into the haven guide,
O receive my soul at last!"*

—*Prophets and Kings*, p. 278.

¹ George Plimpton (2003). *Ernest Shackleton*. NY: DK Publishing Inc.

² Matthew Henry (1721; undated reprint). *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, vol. 5. McLean, VA: MacDonald Publishing Company, p. 364.

³ Walter B. Knight (1956). *Knight's Master Book of New Illustrations*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, p. 327.