

Is it Really Time to Leave the Cities?

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As interest and discussion has increased on the subject of getting out of the cities, many are asking, "Is it really time to leave now"? We hear conflicting voices. Some assure us that there's no need to be alarmed, yet in the evening news we hear of entire cities being "Swept away" and somewhere in the back recesses of our "Adventist" minds that rings a bell (see 7T 82-83 & Ev. 29). Some say the "Sign" to leave the cities has already come, others confidently state that there's no need to worry just now, for the sign will yet be in the future when the "Sunday law" is passed.

How can we know the answer to this question? There's only one way - "We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts." 2 Peter 1:19

Is It Really Time Now?

God sent us these warnings approximately one hundred years ago:

The Protestant world have set up an idol sabbath in the place where God's Sabbath should be, and they are treading in the footsteps of the Papacy. For this reason I see the necessity of the people of God moving out of the cities into retired country [places,] where they may cultivate the land and raise their own produce. Letter 90, 1897. {CL 21.1}

As God's commandment-keeping people, we must leave the cities. As did Enoch, we must work in the cities but not dwell in them.-- Evangelism, pp. 78, 79. (1899) {CL 30.4}

Said the messenger of God, "Shall not the cities be warned? Yes, not by God's people living in them, but by their visiting them, to warn them of what is coming upon the earth." Manuscript Release, Vol. 1, p. 253 (1902)

Leave the cities, and like Enoch come from your retirement to warn the people of the cities. {1MR 250.2} (1902)

Again and again the Lord has instructed that our people are to take their families away from the cities, into the country, where they can raise their own provisions; for in the future the problem of buying and selling will be a very serious one. We should now begin to heed the instruction given us over and over again: Get out of the cities into rural districts, where the houses are not crowded closely together, and where you will be free from the interference of enemies.--Letter 5, 1904. {CL 9-10}

Let children no longer be exposed to the temptations of the cities that are ripe for destruction. The Lord has sent us warning and counsel to get out of the cities. Then let us make no more investments in the cities. Fathers and mothers, how do you regard the souls of your children? Are you preparing the members of your families for translation

into the heavenly courts? Are you preparing them to become members of the royal family? children of the heavenly King? "What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" How will ease, comfort, convenience, compare with the value of the souls of your children?--Manuscript 76, 1905. {CL 12}

"Out of the cities; out of the cities!"--this is the message the Lord has been giving me. The earthquakes will come; the floods will come; and we are not to establish ourselves in the wicked cities, where the enemy is served in every way, and where God is so often forgotten. {RH, July 5, 1906 par. 10}

Out of the cities, is my message at this time. Be assured that the call is for our people to locate miles away from the large cities. One look at San Francisco as it is today would speak to your intelligent minds, showing you the necessity of getting out of the cities. . . . {LDE 95.2}

The Lord calls for His people to locate away from the cities, for in such an hour as ye think not, fire and brimstone will be rained from heaven upon these cities. Proportionate to their sins will be their visitation. When one city is destroyed, let not our people regard this matter as a light affair, and think that they may, if favorable opportunity offers, build themselves homes in that same destroyed city. . . . {LDE 95.3}

Let all who would understand the meaning of these things read the eleventh chapter of Revelation. Read every verse, and learn the things that are yet to take place in the cities. Read also the scenes portrayed in the eighteenth chapter of the same book.--MR 1518 (May 10, 1906). {LDE 95.4}

The instruction is still being given, Move out of the cities. Letter 26, 1907. {CL 28.4}

Who will be warned? We say again, Out of the cities. Manuscript 85, 1908 {CL 14}

Based on the above statements, it should be quite obvious that it has been time to leave the cities for more than one hundred years.

But Doesn't the Sunday Law Have to Come First?

Notice the following statement which explains the sign for God's people to leave the cities:

The time is not far distant, when, like the early disciples, we shall be forced to seek a refuge in desolate and solitary places. As the siege of Jerusalem by the Roman armies was the signal for flight to the Judean Christians, so the assumption of power on the part of our nation in the decree enforcing the papal sabbath will be a warning to us. It will then be time to leave the large cities, preparatory to leaving the smaller ones for retired homes in secluded places among the mountains. 5T 464-465

Some declare that on the basis of this statement, it will not be time to leave the cities until the Sunday law is actually passed. The only problem with this view is that if it isn't really time yet, then Mrs. White was wrong when she made all of those statements quoted above, many with an obvious sense of urgency, regarding the need for God's people to

leave the cities. Could Mrs. White have given such contradictory counsel? Is there another way of looking at this that would be consistent with all of her other counsel?

It has always been the practice of Seventh-day Adventists to compare scripture with scripture and build our positions by harmonizing all of the Word of the Lord. We do not build our theology on a single statement – especially at the expense of a great weight of scriptural evidence. We must follow this same principle if we would understand the signal to leave the cities.

Following are four lines of evidence, showing us that indeed, the sign to leave the cities has already come.

Evidence #1

First, note that this signal to leave the cities in the last days was drawn from a parallel in history, namely the siege by Rome around the city of Jerusalem. Here's how Mrs. White describes it in *Great Controversy*, p. 26: *“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.”* This siege was led by the Roman General Cestius. The followers of Christ inside Jerusalem recognized it as the sign to leave the city, but they could not leave due to the siege. Then one day, for no apparent reason, the Roman armies retreated, giving the Christians an opportunity to leave, which they did. Several years later, the Roman armies returned under the leadership of Titus. Eventually, they took the city and destroyed the temple. Thus, there were **two sieges**, the first being the sign to leave the city.

There is evidence in the Spirit of Prophecy that indeed the sign, or the “First siege” has already come. Let's look again at the description of that first siege under Cestius found in *Great Controversy*, noticing the language used: *“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.”* (GC 26) Now, carefully consider the following quotation: *“The protestant world have set up an idol Sabbath in the place where God's Sabbath should be, and they are treading in the footsteps of the Papacy. For this reason I see the necessity of the people of God moving out of the cities into retired country places.”* *Letter 90, 1897* Notice the almost identical language between these two statements. This is compelling evidence that indeed the modern day parallel – the first siege – has come! But what could it be?

In 1888, there was a remarkable development with reference to a nation wide Sunday law in the United States. In that year, Senator H.W. Blair of New Hampshire introduced a bill into congress now known as the “Blair Bill”. This was the first ever attempt to pass a federal Sunday law. Prior to this, there had been state Sunday laws, but this bill, if passed into law, would make Sunday the legal day of worship in all federal territories. Due in part to the efforts of A.T. Jones in hearings before a congressional committee, the Blair bill was not passed into law. Over time, the issue seemed to subside.

Some will respond, "But the Sunday law wasn't passed!" That's right – just like the first siege did not desolate the city, truly a remarkable parallel. But could this really be an "Assumption of power" if the law was not passed? Let's allow Mrs. White to define the term "Assumption of power". She uses the phrase again in *Signs of the Times, November 22, 1899*: "*But there must be no assumption of power on the part of God's chosen people. Those who take their orders from Christ must not seek to compel others to obey the law of Jehovah.*" Notice that even merely "Seeking" to compel others constitutes an "Assumption of power". But what about the word "Enforcing" – doesn't that mean the law must be passed? No. According to Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary, to enforce can simply mean to "Urge with energy".

It is also important to notice that while the siege around Jerusalem was the signal for fleeing to the mountains, the modern day parallel, according to Mrs. White would be a bit different. Rather than the signal for sudden flight - dropping all work in the cities, the modern day "Sign" would show God's people when it would be time to begin making wise movements out of the metropolitan centers to smaller cities, prior to moving to isolated homes in the mountains. Just as the scope of the modern day application of the Abomination of Desolation is much broader (world wide, as opposed to just the city of Jerusalem), so the time frames involved are more expansive as well - which is certainly consistent with the merciful God we serve!

In the book *Patriarchs and Prophets* we find yet more startling evidence that indeed the modern day "Sign" has appeared. In the chapter entitled, "Destruction of Sodom", Mrs. White draws a parallel between the Abomination of Desolation and the warning to Lot to leave Sodom. She then makes clear that the same warning was being given in her own day:

"Before the destruction of Sodom, God sent a message to Lot, "Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed." **The same voice of warning was heard by the disciples of Christ before the destruction of Jerusalem:** "When ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. Then let them which are in Judea flee to the mountains." Luke 21:20, 21. They must not tarry to secure anything from their possessions, but must make the most of the opportunity to escape.

There was a coming out, a decided separation from the wicked, an escape for life. So it was in the days of Noah; **so with Lot; so with the disciples prior to the destruction of Jerusalem;** and so it will be in the last days. **Again the voice of God is heard in a message of warning,** bidding His people separate themselves from the prevailing iniquity." {PP166}

Does this warning message pertain specifically to the "Out of the cities" message? Notice the following statement:

"I could not sleep past two o'clock this morning. During the night season I was in council. I was pleading with some families to avail themselves of God's appointed means, and **get away from the cities** to save their children. Some were loitering, making no

determined efforts. The angels of mercy hurried Lot and his wife and daughters by taking hold of their hands. Had Lot hastened as the Lord desired him to, his wife would not have become a pillar of salt. Lot had too much of a lingering spirit. Let us not be like him. **The same voice that warned Lot to leave Sodom bids us**, "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, . . . and touch not the unclean." Those who obey this warning will find a refuge. Let every man be wide awake for himself, and try to save his family. Let him gird himself for the work. God will reveal from point to point what to do next." {RH, December 11, 1900 par. 10}

How can we draw any other conclusion than this: That the warning message given in Mrs. White's day was to be understood as a parallel to the warning message to Lot, and also to the warning message given by Christ to His disciples regarding the Abomination of Desolation.

Evidence #2

Secondly, notice what we were commanded to do when the sign should come: *"It will then be time to leave the large cities, preparatory to leaving the smaller ones for retired homes in secluded places among the mountains."* Here we see a step progression – first leaving the large cities and moving to the smaller ones. Finally, there would be a move from the smaller cities to more secluded rural homes. We've already seen that Mrs. White gave a clear call to come out of the cities in her day. But in later years, she began giving specific instructions to leave the "Large" cities. Notice this statement, for example: "Get out of the **large cities** as fast as possible." 6T, 195 That should grab our attention, because the first step we were instructed to take when the sign came was to leave the large cities. The only obvious conclusion would be that if we are to take that first step, then the sign must have come.

Evidence #3

The case for the sign to leave the cities becomes even more compelling when we consider the following statement published in the Review and Herald shortly after the hearings on the Blair Bill. Keep in mind that the National Reform Association was a major backer of the Blair Bill.

"We must show to the world that we recognize, in the events that are now taking place in connection with the National Reform movement, the fulfillment of prophecy. That which we have, for the last thirty or forty years, proclaimed would come, is now here; and the trumpet of every watchman upon the walls of Zion should raise the alarm." {RH, January 1, 1889 par. 3}

Evidence #4

Only several years after the Blair Bill, on August 5, 1892, the United States actually passed legislation by an act of Congress to shut down the Chicago World's Fair on Sundays.

It is no wonder that Mrs. White declared: *"The protestant world have **set up an idol Sabbath** in the place where God's Sabbath should be...."* Letter 90, 189

By the way, we now hear the rumble of the return of the Roman armies. But this will be the **Second Siege!** The unabridged Catechism of the Catholic Church (1994 edition) calls for Sunday legislation. The Lord's Day Alliance is alive and well and announced just after 9-11 that we have entered a time of special opportunity to promote Sunday. (Incidentally, The Lord's Day Alliance was another major backer of the Blair bill in 1888. Still today their official letter head has the word's, "Serving the Churches and the Nation since 1888".) Indeed, the time has come!

Why Did Mrs. White Sometimes Use Language such as "As fast as possible" and "Whenever possible"?

Some point to Mrs. White's use of qualifying phrases such as "As fast as possible" and "Whenever possible" to suggest that everyone does not need to heed the counsel to get out of the cities. A careful and thorough consideration of these statements actually reveals a view that is in harmony with the mountain of counsel that all of God's people need to move out of the cities. Notice the statements below:

Get out of the large cities as fast as possible. 6T, 195 {CL 12} (1900)

Whenever possible, it is the duty of parents to make homes in the country for their children. The children and youth should be carefully guarded. They should be kept away from the hotbeds of iniquity that are to be found in our cities. Letter 268, 1906. {CL 12.2}

Now consider these statements in light of the following quotation:

The time has come, when, as God opens the way, families should move out of the cities." Manuscript 50, 1903

Notice, that this constitutes a warning against rash moves. We must move wisely and carefully in the providence of God, relying implicitly upon His guidance. Consider also the following statement which sheds yet more light on all of this:

For years we have been instructed that our brethren and sisters, and especially families with children, should plan to leave the cities as the way opens before them to do so. Many will have to labor earnestly to help open the way. RH, Sept. 27, 1906

Here we see that God must open the way, and yet the only way that we will know if it "Is possible" is if we are actually exerting efforts along those lines. In fact, how can we expect to know we are moving "As fast as possible" unless we are earnestly seeking to find the way out of the city. These statements deal with how we are to move forward, not whether or not we all need to heed God's warnings.

But Aren't Families Counseled to Move to Cities?

Finally, some quote a couple of statements in which Mrs. White encourages families to move to cities to engage in missionary work. Once again, they seek to use these quotes

to disregard the many other statements making clear our duty to get out of the cities. But upon careful examination and taking all of the counsel of the Spirit of Prophecy into account, we find once again that there is perfect harmony.

We see the great need of missionary work to carry the truth not only to foreign countries, but to those who are near us. Close around us are cities and towns in which no efforts are made to save souls. Why should not families who know the present truth settle in these cities and villages, to set up there the standard of Christ, working in humility, not in their own way, but in God's way, to bring the light before those who have no knowledge of it? {ChS 180.1}

It is not the purpose of God that His people should colonize or settle together in large communities. The disciples of Christ are His representatives upon the earth, and God designs that they shall be scattered all over the country, in the towns, cities, and villages, as lights amidst the darkness of the world. They are to be missionaries for God, by their faith and works testifying to the near approach of the coming Saviour. {8T 244-245}

First, keep in mind that God's people were explicitly instructed to leave the large cities first, moving to smaller ones. (5T, 464-465) This was confirmed in 1900 when Mrs. White wrote, "Get out of the **large cities** as fast as possible." 6T, 195 It would then be in accordance with her counsel to live in smaller cities at that time. The view that would harmonize all the counsel on the subject would be that she must have been referring to the smaller cities. To suggest another interpretation, would be to suggest a glaring contradiction. Notice that the language in both of these quotes places these cities in the context of towns and villages: "Cities and towns", "Cities and villages" and "Towns, cities, and villages".

But What About City Evangelism?

There is no question that Mrs. White was passionate about reaching the lost in the cities with the Three Angels Messages.

"God's people are not doing the work He would have them do for the cities. I have borne this testimony again and again until it seemed as if God's people were not going to do the work; but the cities must be entered. We must not let the people perish that do not know the binding force of God's law. We are responsible. The Lord wants us to awake. We must go forward, or the judgments of God will certainly come upon us. During the past few months the good work has begun among the great cities of the land. As soon as the cities began to be entered, the pain in my heart was relieved." {PUR, January 12, 1911 par. 3}

While she did not advise simply dropping altogether the work in the cities in order to move to the country, she was, nevertheless clear to declare that God would have us work from without the cities to reach the lost masses in the great metropolitan centers of our nation. Her counsel was thus that while we continue to exert our efforts to reach the lost in the cities, we nevertheless work to relocate so that we could follow God's plan in our evangelistic outreach:

“ Let men of sound judgment be appointed, not to publish abroad their intentions, but to search for such properties in the rural districts, in easy access to the cities, suitable for small training schools for workers, and where facilities may also be provided for treating the sick and weary souls who know not the truth. Look for such places just out from the large cities, where suitable buildings may be secured, either as a gift from the owners, or purchased at a reasonable price by the gifts of our people. Do not erect buildings in the noisy cities”.--Medical Ministry, pp. 308, 309. (1909) {CL 30.3}

Said the messenger of God, “Shall not the cities be warned? Yes, not by God’s people living in them, but by their visiting them, to warn them of what is coming upon the earth.” Manuscript Release, Vol. 1, p. 253 (1902)

As God's commandment-keeping people, we must leave the cities. As did Enoch, we must work in the cities but not dwell in them.-- Evangelism, pp. 78, 79. (1899) {CL 30.4}

Anybody Losing Sleep Over This?

The urgency of God’s people moving out of the cities weighed so heavily upon Mrs. White that she lost sleep over it. It would seem that such concern is sadly lacking today.

I could not sleep past two o'clock this morning. During the night season I was in council. I was pleading with some families to avail themselves of God's appointed means, and get away from the cities to save their children. Some were loitering, making no determined efforts. {CL 6.6}

The angels of mercy hurried Lot and his wife and daughters by taking hold of their hands. Had Lot hastened as the Lord desired him to, his wife would not have become a pillar of salt. Lot had too much of a lingering spirit. Let us not be like him. The same voice that warned Lot to leave Sodom bids us, "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, . . . and touch not the unclean." Those who obey this warning will find a refuge. Let every man be wide awake for himself, and try to save his family. Let him gird himself for the work. God will reveal from point to point what to do next. Review and Herald, Dec. 11, 1900. {CL 6-7}

May God have mercy on us!

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