

Preparing For Bad Times (Part 1)

A Godly Duty

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Romans 13:11-12 And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light.

I want to remind us all that for about fifty years Herbert Armstrong, through the pages of the *Plain Truth* and the *Good News*, and through the radio and television broadcasts, personal appearances, sermons, articles, booklets and Bible studies, warned of the collapse of the United States and the British Commonwealth. One very well-known personality, whose name that I think most of us would recognize immediately, sarcastically stated that HWA had us on the gun lap for so long that he shot himself in the foot. What he was implying was that Herbert Armstrong had preached upon the "time of the end" so long and so often that he had destroyed his credibility. Herbert Armstrong also said that we have to *live* our lives as though Christ will return at the next moment, but *plan* our lives as though life will go indefinitely.

In I Thessalonians 5 Paul adds this to what was written in the book of Romans.

I Thessalonians 5:6-8 Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night. But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for a helmet, the hope of salvation.

This is, in a way, virtually the same thing that he said there in Romans 13:11, especially in regard to the "sleeping" and the "night" part of it. But what is implied here is that when a person is asleep, time is passing, events are

occurring, but as far as the sleeping person is concerned, nothing is going on. They are unaware of it. They are insensitive to what is going on around them.

In Matthew 25 Jesus gave something of the same order when all ten virgins were asleep. We have used this in reference to the entire church of God—the greater church of God—and we all went to sleep at the switch. All of us to some degree or another were unaware and insensitive to what was going on as doctrines were changed. We certainly could see the fact that doctrines were being changed, but we did not have any idea really where it was headed and what was going to be the outcome of it.

Now we see the church scattered all over the place, and we now know what we are asleep to is our own personal spiritual condition, our own personal circumstance in relation to God. As we see in that parable, some went out to find oil when they began to become aware, but it was too late at that time. That is kind of the theme of what Paul is talking about here, that we have to be **awake** to what is going on around us, and if we are not awake—aware, sensitive to—the things around us slide by that we do not catch.

II Peter 1:19 We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto you do well that you take heed, as unto a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts.

Herbert Armstrong was only following what is clearly a biblical responsibility for a true minister of God. We have seen Paul urging the people to be awake and alert. We have seen Peter saying the same thing, not quite as directly as Paul did, but nonetheless he was doing essentially the same thing. In reference to any of these men, it is not a matter of saying something so long that it is bound to happen—sooner or later you are going to say something right, and Christ is going to return! That is not the point at all. Herbert Armstrong understood what he was speaking about by revelation of who modern-day Israel is.

If you are familiar at all with the early years of the preaching of Herbert Armstrong, you will probably recall that he thought that World War II was **IT**. That is, that this was *the* event that was leading to the dreaded

Armageddon. About two-thirds of the way through World War II though, he realized that he was mistaken about that. So he changed the direction of his preaching—that a series of events would occur that certainly must have sounded fantastic—almost other-worldly, or wild and crazy to some of the people who were hearing it at the time—and that is despite all the destruction and devastation and the breaking of the morale of the people in Europe (and especially the German people), that Europe, especially Germany, was going to rise again, and the victors, the Western World—mostly Israelitish, especially the United States and Great Britain—were going to **fall**, and be defeated.

As an overview, events have inexorably moved in the general direction that Herbert Armstrong preached. Albeit, they moved a great deal more slowly than he ever dreamed that they would be going. Basically he taught that there would be a series of enervating morale-breaking wars, leading to an economic collapse that is aided and abetted by natural disasters. And that at the same time it is breaking and sapping the will and the morale and economic condition of the Israelitish countries, it is going to prove to be an aid to the Beast to rise above the Israelites. The wars, including trade wars, and the natural disasters, such as hurricanes and droughts and earthquakes and floods, would lead eventually to wide-scale famine, and finally end in disease epidemics, national economic collapse, and national slavery. But as I said, things have moved a great deal more slowly than we would like, because we very much desire the rule of God on earth.

Again, a brief flash-back into the '60s. I heard Roderick Meredith give a sermon at the Feast of Tabernacles in 1968 in which he gave three reasons why we would not flee in 1972. Later in class at Ambassador College, he said that after conversations with Herbert Armstrong on that subject, that he (Herbert Armstrong) told Roderick Meredith to preach that to the people during the Feast. This was 1968. Again, Herbert Armstrong realized that things were wrong with his calculations, and so he adjusted. Many did not understand that, and so he became a laughingstock (that 1972 was the date). But he was ahead of these things. He just did not know when the end was going to be, and it is unfortunate perhaps that that message did not get out to more people. But I did hear it.

There is a proverb that basically says, "Man proposes, but God disposes." In Romans 11:34 Paul asked, "Who has known the mind of the Lord?" God has given us prophecy, and He knows where He is headed, but we look through a glass **darkly**. Brethren, we are looking, and we are trying to be abreast of what is going on. We think that it is time to stir our minds to begin to get prepared for some very difficult economic times that we feel are looming just over the horizon. In the light of the series of sermons that I have been giving lately, I feel compelled to give a review of a principle of faith that might prove to be very valuable regarding surviving and growing through what is surely coming.

I do not believe that Mr. Armstrong was wrong. The *timing* was wrong, because he looked through a glass darkly as well. The apostles, in Acts 1, wanted to know *when*, and Jesus said it is not in God's purpose to reveal *when*. He said basically, "You're going to have to live your life not knowing. Even I don't know." So the Boss has it in mind. He knows where He is headed, but all of the rest of us have to do a great deal of speculating. We have to view what is going on and move or go and live our lives with the understanding of prophecy that we have at this moment, and so we could be right or wrong at any given time. We hope we are right, but please leave a little bit of room in your mind that we might be wrong as well.

Right from the very beginning when God put Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, He commanded them to "dress it" and "keep it." In short, they were to work. I do not know that He told them where He was headed at that time. He said "Here's your home. Dress it and keep it." The implication is obvious. He was telling them, even before they sinned, that survival and progress were partly going to depend upon **them**.

"Dress" as an overview basically means "to embellish." It means "to decorate" it. It means "to improve." Now, one wonders how you could improve or dress or embellish the Garden of Eden, but we understand that God meant more than that. The whole rest of the world was out there, and they were not going to stay in the garden the rest of their lives, and so it

gives me the implication that the rest of the world was not dressed, it was not embellished, it was not improved. That was going to be up to man as he spread from that point.

The word "keep" means "to maintain." It means to guard, to preserve, and so God was telling them (and us) that He had created a system that was by nature going to run down, to deteriorate, and so it had to be kept in a state of beauty. It would not just stay that way. We all understand this is true. If you just stand still and never sleep and never eat, you are going to deteriorate in a hurry, are you not? If you never exercise, you are going to deteriorate. We understand in simple terminology what He was telling them, that if there is going to be improvement, that if there is going to be a guarding against deterioration, one has to dress and keep in every situation.

When Jesus gave His instruction in Matthew 6 regarding faith, and observing how God operates His creation to preserve even the life of birds, we can learn from that that God expects birds and other creatures to forage for their food. Birds just do not go perch on a branch, open up their beaks, and God plops a worm into their mouth. You know that is not the way it is. You know from your own experience, from observation, that birds work very hard to survive. God requires birds to work; but God provides. So there is cooperation between the two.

God makes nature so that it will produce, but the birds have to make something of what God produces from the earth, and it is much the same with us. So for us to just sit and wait for God to take care of us would not only in most cases be downright foolish, it might be sheer presumption, and that is a very great sin because presumption is a form of pride. In this case it would be saying to God, "I am so important that you will take care of me regardless." That could be a very grave ignoring of His instruction, as we will see.

Philippians 4:11-13 Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me.

Philippians 4:19 But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

What has Paul said here? Here is the great apostle Paul, and *surely* God would take care of him. Well, God *did* take care of him, but we can learn very much because God allowed the apostle Paul to have periods of time in which he was **abased**. I mean, there were times that were really skinny. There were times when the economic conditions were not too good, and then there were other times when he had plenty. If God dealt this way with the apostle Paul, do you think that He is going to deal any differently with us? Are there not going to be bad times to go along with good? Are there not going to be rainy days as well as sunshiny days? You know the old cliché, *if you have all sunshine, you live on a desert*, and nothing grows.

We have to learn to look at life this way. Life is not always going to stay good. It is going to go up and down even for those who are the most godly among us. We know enough from Paul's writings to know that when things were down with him—I mean things were downright skimpy—Paul may have missed meals from time to time. Not only did he survive, but he survived with a confident peace of mind without any rancor or bitterness about the way that God dealt with him. I want you to notice that he had **learned** to be content. It was not something that came automatically. It was not something that he learned in a classroom. He learned it by a combination of his faith in God and the experience that he had with God that God wants us to go through periods of deprivation. Jesus Christ *learned* by the things which He *suffered*. He learned obedience by the things which He suffered.

“To be abased” more literally means that Paul learned how to discipline himself. He did not go to pieces when things went bad. He learned to discipline himself when things went badly, or he *thought* they were going badly. As we would say today, when those times occur, he tightened his belt another notch, and went on. Paul then learned through all these experiences, through the bad times and the good times, through the prosperous times and the poor times, so that he became skilled at both. Believe me, brethren, it takes *skill* to live during times of prosperity. It probably takes more skill to live through times of prosperity than through times of deprivation.

Thomas Carlisle, the English philosopher-writer said this: "For every man who can stand prosperity, there are a hundred that can stand adversity." A pretty interesting quote, that prosperity is more destructive than adversity.

So when things got bad, Paul disciplined himself. When things got real good, Paul disciplined himself so he did not get carried away by it. Paul was prepared through life and his experiences with God to ride out the storms through his faith in God. So if preparation was impossible, he just tightened his belt and he went on the best he could.

God fed Israel for forty years. "My God can supply all your needs," Paul said. God fed Israel—millions of people in a wilderness area—and He kept them moving so that they could not put down roots and start growing crops. They had to depend on Him. There is a very valuable lesson here. God took care of them through **everything**, but you know from the story that there were times they were hurting. Skimpy times. So what did they do?

Well, like every Israelite, they griped and complained and grumbled and murmured, and God would have a period of softness, and He would give them something to keep them going, but He did give them what was necessary. He did not give them the variety that we seem to think is necessary today, and so for forty years they ate manna. I guess that is all right! They ate angels' food. And there were times that He sent them the quail, which led to a disaster.

There is a lesson there. The prosperity devastated them through their lusts. He fed Elijah, using ravens. Angels fed Christ at the end of His forty-day fast. Christ fed five thousand at one time, and four thousand at another, and that same God is with us today. He can supply whatever we need when we need it.

I want you to notice in the illustrations that I just gave you, that all of this was done in circumstances where people could not possibly supply their own need. There was no way for them to prepare for their situation. There is a cliché, that God helps those that help themselves and that is generally true. God seems to respect those who do not just sit back and expect others to take care of them, but He will help those who lawfully and without arrogance work to take care of others as well as themselves.

Let us add another principle to this from Matthew 24, the Olivet Prophecy that Jesus gave.

Matthew 24:15-21 When you therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso reads, let him understand); then let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains: Let him which is on the housetop not come down to take anything out of his house: Neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes. And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days! But pray you that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day: For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.

Why does God tell us these things? Does He not sound a warning through prophecy so that we can be prepared for what is coming and survive it as well as possible? Yes, He does. That is a biblical principle. Warnings are given to motivate preparation.

Matthew 24:42-44 Watch therefore: for you know not what hour your Lord does come. 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 you also ready: for in such an hour as you think not the Son of man comes.

Be prepared, is what that is saying. In this case the emphasis is decidedly spiritual, so we should be prepared all the time, just as Herbert Armstrong said. Live your life as though Christ might come the next moment, then you are always prepared for that. The principle of taking warning and doing something about it is the same, whether physically or spiritually.

You will find the same God giving virtually the same kind of instruction back in the Old Testament.

Ezekiel 3:17 Son of man, *I* have made you a watchman unto the house of Israel.

God appointed Ezekiel, and he was a watchman. A watchman *watches*, and a watchman *warns*. Now why does he warn? Does he not warn so that people can be prepared for when the enemy comes?

Ezekiel 3:17-18 Son of man, I have made you a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me. When I say unto the wicked, You shall surely die; and you give him not warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at your hand.

That appointment from God carries a weighty responsibility.

Ezekiel 3:19 Yet if you warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered your soul.

That is because he carried out his responsibility.

Ezekiel 3:20-21 Again, When a righteous man does turn from his righteousness, and commit iniquity, and I lay a stumblingblock before him, he shall die: because you have not given him warning, he shall die in his sin, and his righteousness which he has done shall not be remembered; but his blood will I require at your hand. ["Mr. Watchman, you're the guilty guy."] Nevertheless if you warn the righteous man, that the righteous sin not, and he does not sin, he shall surely live, because he is warned; also you have delivered your soul.

That is pretty clear that warnings are given to get one to prepare and to change the direction of one's life.

Turn now to Ezekiel 33. Somewhat the same sense is here, except there is something added to this.

Ezekiel 33:1-2 Again the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, speak to the children of your people, and say unto them, When I bring the sword upon a land, if the people of the land take a man of their coasts, and set him for their watchman. . .

You can see the difference already. In Ezekiel 3, *God* did the appointing. In Ezekiel 33, the people are seeking out somebody to watch for them.

Ezekiel 33:3 If when he sees the sword come upon the land, he blow the trumpet, and warn the people. . .

"Sword" is a means of implying devastation—death through warfare—but could it not also stand for other things that might devastate a community? If a watchman were set out there to look for tornadoes that might come, a tornado that could devastate, could not people choose a watchman to be watching for bad weather? Sure they could. Could they not appoint people, as we begin to stretch this principle out of this, to watch for pestilence, to watch for the scourge of locusts, or whatever it might be? How about somebody who might look for economic disaster? Do we not in our society have prognosticators who are looking into present conditions and prognosticating all the time as to what is going to happen?

When we **knew** that there was going to be an El Nino, you could hardly turn on the weather channel without getting some kind of a warning of what they believed that El Nino was going to produce. They were warning you to get ready, and so basically what they told us in the South was, *Get ready for warmer weather. Get ready for a wetter winter.* It happened. We had a very wet, warm winter, but they also told us that it was probably going to stop hurricanes from forming, and it did. We only had, I believe, three or four hurricanes last year, which was nothing, and they were all rather mild. So people, take notice. So they warned. It is the principle that we are playing with here.

Ezekiel 33:3-4 If when he sees the sword come upon the land, he blow the trumpet, and warn the people, then whosoever hears the sound of the trumpet, and takes not warning, if the sword come, and take him away, his blood shall be upon his own head.

You either take the warning or you do not. If the warning is given and you do not take it, then God holds you responsible. If the warning is good, it is given and taken, and then you change your life, well great! You have profited, see.

What I am leading to here is that everybody has a responsibility. The watchman has a responsibility, and those who **hear** have a responsibility, and God judges accordingly.

Ezekiel 33:5-6 He heard the sound of the trumpet, and took not warning: his blood shall be upon him. But he that takes warning shall deliver his soul. But if the watchman see the sword come, and blow not the trumpet, and the people be not warned; if the sword come, and take any person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at the watchman's hand.

I believe, brethren, that in some measure, you have chosen me to be a watchman for you. My responsibility is overwhelmingly spiritual. In fact we began to recognize these things very quickly, and so what does it say on the *Forerunner*? "Preparing Christians for the Kingdom of God." We are giving you warnings that the Kingdom of God, as far as we are able to see, is not very far off, and this is what you need to do in order to get prepared. I am not a watchman to physical Israel, but I am a watchman for *spiritual* Israel, and you in particular. If we follow the principle, then others have chosen other watchmen to watch out for them. What we have done in the Church of the Great God is we have made the spiritual our main thrust.

You notice, though, that people have to do something on their own. The watchman has to do **his** job, and those who are hearing have to do **their** job. The entire responsibility does not fall on the watchman.

Go back to Exodus 9. I will give you an illustration out of the plagues that fell upon Egypt. We will see that the same God that wrote Ezekiel was following this principle back here in the book of Exodus. You will see it immediately.

Exodus 9:13-14 And the LORD said unto Moses, Rise up early in the morning, and stand before Pharaoh, and say unto him, Thus says the LORD God of the Hebrews, Let my people go, that they may serve me. For I will at this time send all my plagues upon your heart, and upon your servants, and upon your people; that you may know that there is none like me in all the earth.

Notice the initial instruction. God says to His servant Moses, "Go and warn Pharaoh." Now we will see what he does. That is basically the underlying thought here. Let us see what Pharaoh does with the warning.

Exodus 9:15-18 For now I will stretch out my hand, that I may smite you and your people with pestilence; and you shall be cut off from the earth. And in very deed for this cause have I raised you up, for to show in you my power; and that my name may be declared throughout all the earth. [Moses is to tell Pharaoh all of this.] As yet exalt you yourself against my people, that you will not let them go? Behold, tomorrow about this time I will cause it to rain a very grievous hail, such as has not been in Egypt since the foundation thereof even until now.

Now notice this mercy.

Exodus 9:19-20 Send therefore now, and gather your cattle, and all that you have in the field; for upon every man and beast which shall be found in the field, and shall not be brought home, the hail shall come down upon them, and they shall die. [Verse 20 tells us what happened.] He that feared the word of the LORD [he who took warning] among the servants of Pharaoh made his servants and his cattle flee into the houses.

That tells you very clearly that the message did not just get to Pharaoh, it also got to the people. God gave Egypt **fair warning** of what was going to occur, and whether you were an Egyptian or whether you were an Israelite, if you wanted to heed that warning, you saved your skin. Do you think that if an Egyptian heard the warning about the blood on the doorpost and the lintel and so forth and decided to put it on his own house, do you think that person would have died even though he was firstborn? Absolutely not! He would have been covered by the blood of the lamb because he believed. God's promises go out to everybody.

Exodus 9:21 And he that regarded not the word of the LORD left his servants and his cattle in the field.

And of course we know that they died.

Proverbs 22:3 A prudent man foresees the evil, and hides himself: but the simple pass on, and are punished.

A prudent person is a person of understanding. *Understanding* is the *eye* of a person's heart. A prudent person is a person of understanding. Today in the vernacular we would call them a person with common sense; a sensible person, one who exercises caution. Now the fool plunges on, ignoring the warnings. This gives us a little bit more insight into the mind of God, and that is that God's way is not the way of impulsive speculation based on feelings that everything will be okay. "Give you the facts, man," as best we possibly can. God expects His children to be sensible.

Are you beginning to see why to be presumptuous is a sin? To be presumptuous is to say, "Well, God's going to take care of me regardless." When you start feeding in a lot of other verses from the Bible, no, God takes care of those who are sensible, and *sometimes* He takes care of those who stupidly ignore His warnings because He is merciful. You cannot bank on that, but you can bank on Him taking care of the prudent person, just like He took care of Paul. I am sure that Paul was prudent. God's way is to prepare for what is ahead and make adjustments as more facts become available.

Let us go back a few chapters to Proverbs 6, a very interesting section in this regard. We will begin in verse 4, and you will see a familiar word that we began this sermon with.

Proverbs 6:4 Give not sleep to your eyes. . . .

Obviously this is going to be about work. Be alert! Be prepared!

Proverbs 6:4 Give not sleep to your eyes, nor slumber to your eyelids.

You can apply that either physically or spiritually. It applies both ways.

Proverbs 6:5 Deliver yourself as a roe from the hand of the hunter.
. . .

What does a roe do when it senses that a hunter is around? It gets out of there! It is prudent by nature, sensitive to its environment.

Proverbs 6:5-11 ...And as a bird from the hand of the fowler. Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: Which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, provides her meat in the summer, and gathers her food in the harvest. How long will you sleep, O sluggard? When will you arise out of your sleep? Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: So shall your poverty [your ruin] come as one that travels [How do you travel? Step by step. Step by step the poverty will come.] and your want [or lack] as an armed man.

The ant is an example of foresight in preparing in good times for the bad times. The good times are the harvest times. The best time for an ant would be in the wintertime. In addition to that, an ant is shown here to be industrious. It is a self-starter. It does not need somebody to be prompting, as we used to say in the steel mill, or having somebody to push them all the time into doing work. They just go at it. The ant does not need anybody to drive or push it, and so we see three things here about an ant that are very helpful to you and me.

Proverbs 30:25 The ants are a people not strong, yet they prepare their meat [their food] in the summer.

So there the ant's foresight is commended as something that we are to follow.

All that I have given you so far is sound spiritual advice from God, but is also sound physical counsel as well, and as I said earlier in this sermon, I believe that it is time that we begin to take purposeful steps in making ourselves secure against what is surely coming. Do you think that it is possible that the United States is going to ride this economic boom for all time, that it is never going to end?

Proverbs 13:22 A good man leaves an inheritance to his children's children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just.

We are just picking up a principle here, and that is the laying up of an inheritance, or setting aside during the good times. That may not be the main thrust of this particular verse, but from it you can clearly see that God expects a person to lay up money for his children and his children's children. God is not against what we might call a savings plan. He expects it. That is prudent. A person who is careful does that kind of thing, because a careful person knows that life does not always stay in a prosperous mode.

Everybody—even God's beloved—goes from the top of the arch to the bottom, and so we have to expect that since this same God is working with us, we are going to go from the top to the bottom, and back up again, and we are going to bounce around the middle. There are going to be good times, and there are going to be bad times. There will be times of health, times of prosperity, and times of sickness, just like Solomon said. There seems to be a time for the whole gamut of the human experience in our lives.

Jesus adds something to this in Luke 12 that is also part of an important principle.

Luke 12:15-21 And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consists not in the abundance of the things which he possesses. And he spoke a parable unto them,

saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have much goods laid up for many years: take your ease: eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, You fool, this night your soul shall be required of you: then whose shall those things be, which you have provided? So is he that lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.

Jesus indicated there is nothing wrong with a man storing up provision against an evil day, but He did make very clear that we should not leave God and other people out of the picture by neglecting our spiritual responsibilities. How much storage reserve seems to be enough biblically? Well, it seems to stretch in the Bible from a season (that would be three months) to long enough to get to the next harvest, to—in the case of an inheritance—your children's children. That could be quite a sizeable reserve.

Right now I think I am more concerned about a minimum, and in looking at the ant He says "a season." That is something that we can learn through God's creation. Now we have to remember that the Bible also shows us that there are two harvests of the "staff of life" in a year's time. The "staff of life" is the grain. There is winter wheat, and there is summer wheat. You sow barley in the fall; you harvest it in the spring. You get the picture. A minimum might be anywhere from one season, let us say three months, up to and including maybe six to nine months, from one harvest to another, to carry a person through just in case the income is cut off.

In Charlotte there is a financial guru who is on the major radio station there and he has a program every day for an hour. His name is Danny Fontana. He generally gives pretty sound advice and is very conservative in his approach to things. In the past couple of weeks ago he said that a man is foolish who does not have enough ready cash to survive three months without income. He thought that was like a minimum that a person should be able to have. And by coincidence that seems to coincide with what the Bible said about having at least a season's worth of food stuffs or whatever to carry you through.

In terms of food stuffs, perishable things, I think we could say a minimum would be one season's worth. In the terms of the harder things like money and other real assets like real estate, land, or buildings, it might be a great deal longer. We also had the example of Joseph. That was a special case, but in that case they were able to store grain, the staff of life, of up to seven years. It will keep. It will keep so well in a place like Egypt that there is wheat that is growing today that originally came from wheat that they found in Egypt that was stored in the tombs of the kings. It was two thousand years old or more, and it still had that germ of life in it. So something like grain, under the right circumstances, will keep a long, long time. Again, we have a biblical reference there in the time of a **very** great disaster. God instructed His servant Joseph to set aside what amounted to seven years, six years, five years, four years, and so forth of grain so it would last at least a period of seven years.

What is happening to raise this caution in me to warn you? Well, very much that makes me believe that economic bad times are just over the horizon. I do not mean that the United States of America and Canada are just going to break down the day after tomorrow. I am not talking about that, but there are indications that we are living on the edge of a precipice economically. I will just give you a few of them. These are not like a specific stock is going up, but wherever overall trends appear; we can tell from history that these trends preceded bad times. These are not in any order of importance. They were just the things that came to mind as I was preparing this sermon.

First of all, the amount of debt in this nation in government, in business, and in personal indebtedness is **AWESOME**. I mean it is beyond our comprehension. Twenty-five percent of all American families are two paydays away from bankruptcy! There are a lot of reasons for this, but be that as it may, the statistics are ugly, and they are frightening. You may hear at some time usually some governmental figure, or sometimes an economist, who will tell you that the indebtedness of the Federal Government is \$5.9 trillion. That sounds like a huge figure to you and me, and indeed it is, but the real debt is almost **incomprehensible**, because it is **NOT** \$5.9 trillion. The real debt of the Federal Government is just shy of \$19 trillion.

It is a little bit of an accounting thing, and it is one of those things that is a half-lie when they say \$5.9 trillion. What they are giving you is the "book" figure of how much the government owes without adding the interest on the loans to it, and so the indebtedness, plus the interest that is owed, adds up to \$19 trillion.

Understand it this way. You may be buying a house. You have a mortgage on the house. You look at the paper there and it says *I owe \$50,000*. No you do not! You owe \$50,000 plus the interest, which might be three or four times higher than the \$50,000, and by the time you are done paying for the house, you have paid into that house \$200,000 or \$250,000 rather than \$50,000.

Think on the same thing with the figure on the government. That is a stupendous amount! Almost \$19 trillion! If you count backwards even one billion seconds from this time right today, it brings you out to just after Christ was crucified. That is *one billion*. One trillion is one thousand billion. It would take you a thousand times further backwards just for **one** trillion. Now multiply that by 19. This will give you some sort of an idea of how big a trillion is. It is incomprehensible.

We say the government owes it. No! **YOU** owe it! Do you know what happens whenever governments get this far in debt? I will tell you what happens. A revolution occurs and the revolutionaries declare the indebtedness invalid. They are not going to pay it. Well, what if some other country holds large portions of that indebtedness? What do they do? They go to war to collect the debt against the one who owes them the money—you and me. Wars are fought over money. It is not altruism, it is money.

Ecclesiastes 10:19 A feast is made for laughter, and wine makes merry: but money answers all things.

Ecclesiastes 7:12 For wisdom is a defense, and money is a defense: but the excellency of knowledge is, that wisdom gives life to them that have it.

Money does not give life.

You have to understand those two verses that I just gave you within the context of the book of Ecclesiastes. We understand that money really does not answer everything, but within the context of the book of Ecclesiastes, what he says there is accurate and true. I mentioned to you that the United States is in debt \$19 trillion, and that twenty-five percent of American private citizens are two paydays away from bankruptcy. Perhaps never in the history of the world has wealth ever slid so rapidly from so many to so few. The one-time vast and wealthy American middle-class—and that is where the bulk of America's wealth was once held—is being wiped out through a combination of profligacy in regard to spending, and absorbed by those who truly **are** wealthy. The rich are getting richer at the fastest pace ever in the history of this world.

Historically, this is a sign of impending economic crisis, followed by a revolution. When people get so poor they cannot even buy food, what happens? They go to war. They riot, and that is happening very rapidly. You might hear the statistics that seventy percent of Americans own their own homes. Again this is another very misleading statistic. You do not own your own home. Unless you have your mortgage paid off, the *bank* owns your home.

Again, by way of coincidence, just this past Sabbath there was an article in the *Charlotte Observer* written by a man, a financial person, whose specialty is real estate. He is asked questions, and he gives answers in the newspaper. The question that was asked involved a man who held a second mortgage on a piece of real estate that he owned. It was a house. He was holding the second mortgage, and for the person who was living in the home, the bank had the first mortgage. The person who asked the question had the second mortgage. He helped finance the purchase of this home. The question asked revolved around this issue. The person who was in the home and paying on this second mortgage was no longer paying on the second mortgage. He had not made three payments. So the question was, “When should I begin the legal process to collect this money?” The answer was very interesting. The answer was, “You should have begun after the first month to foreclose on that person.”

I bring this to your attention because if you have no money set aside to get by for several months while you are out of work, and you are purchasing your house, and a bank is holding the mortgage on that house, and you have no income coming in, how long do you think the bank is going to allow you to slide by without you paying your mortgage? Business is tough. If this real estate expert said that you have already passed the deadline in three months, I am pretty sure that most banks are not going to let you slide by for very long.

When Evelyn and I were going through some rough economic times in the sixties, our bank allowed us to "slide" by only one month, and we got a pink slip with the next one; see, the second month. When the mortgage came due the second month and we did not pay it, and then the next month, which was the third month that we missed, we not only got the pink slip along with our notice to pay the mortgage, but also we got a letter that they were going to begin foreclosing. They did let us go by three months, but in that case the church came to our rescue and advanced us the money which we later paid back, but nonetheless the warning was there, and I will tell you, that registered on my mind to not allow that kind of thing to occur.

We Americans are living in a fool's paradise. It would almost seem like by observing things that there are not many prudent people left. In addition, further indications show we are headed for an economic downfall, that despite the much ballyhooed budget surplus that the United States is having this year, taxes are still rising, because the Federal Government is not the only government to whom you are paying taxes. Federal, state, and local city taxes are still rising, and so it is one of these things like "The Lord giveth, and the Lord taketh away," so they drop the income tax a tiny amount, but they get it back in another direction with another tax.

We just passed "T-Day" in May, and I do not have any statistic for this year, but I do have a statistic for last year, 1997. In 1997 it took two days longer to pay the taxes than it did in 1996. Now at this same time the taxes are rising, and Americans *real* income is dropping. The last year for which I have statistics is 1996. At that time the *real* income of the average American was \$19,000. This was of course after he pays his taxes. This is his net. What he actually has to work with to feed himself, to buy a house, to buy a car, to buy clothing, is \$19,000.

Now I will tell you something. It has not risen since the late 80s. In the midst of this great boom that we are having, Americans *real* income is dropping as taxes rise. The quality of life, the cost of living, is actually rising. To add to this, bankruptcies are at an all-time high. There were 1,300,000 in 1997. In 1985 Americans had fifteen percent more savings than they had debt, but today, according to *Baron's Weekly*, debt is thirty-five percent higher than cash balances. That represents a fifty-percent change in twelve years! We are stoning ourselves right into a major depression, or at the least a pretty sizeable recession.

The average American family today, and this includes everybody, has \$10,000 in financial assets, and most of this is being held in mutual funds. Not many years ago those people held their savings in savings accounts, not in mutual funds. The people have been persuaded to move their cash into mutual funds by the fact that a savings account may pay two or three percent interest, whereas a mutual fund may pay four to five percent interest, and so there is a little bit of a gain.

That seems to be wise at first until you begin to understand that a mutual fund is not as secure as a savings account. Most people do not realize that a mutual fund represents money **not** held as cash by the bank, but rather in stocks, and therefore when you write a check on a bank and ask for cash, the bank gives you cash. It withdraws money from its own reserves, but then has to sell stock in order to replace the money that it took out of its reserves.

Now all of that sounds very neat, but what most apparently do not consider is that the mutual fund is directly tied to all the vagaries of the stock market, and it has little more than paper value that can diminish greatly in very short order. We might ask the question, "Wouldn't the bank protect you by continually withdrawing from its reserves, see, if the stock market started to go south?" Well, I would say maybe in the days of the family friendly local bank where you knew the banker, and you were all friends, and you golfed together and that kind of thing. Maybe that would have occurred, but are you aware that in the last few years the Federal Reserve System lowered the bank reserve requirements to only seven and one-half percent? They only have to

keep seven dollars and fifty cents in cash for every one hundred dollars deposited with them. That is the lowest it has ever been in American history, lower than just before the big crash in 1929.

You see, the bankers are taking advantage of this wonderful bull market that we have going, and they are speculating and giving everybody the impression that they are "wise" in what they are doing, but they are gambling that everything is going to continue as it is. The gamble might be one with a smaller risk than normal. I do not know, but they are playing with our money, so we have now the lowest reserve requirements in American history, and so there is only \$7.50 for every \$100 of assets that they have on their books. That requirement gives them more money to play with, but it is risky.

I will give only one more thing here, because there is much more just involving the stock market and I do not consider myself to be any guru. I just do a lot of reading and I have not said anything about any particular stock. These are just general trends that are heading toward something that is going to one of these days mark a very severe problem.

But I will say this, and that is we have got to take seriously what is occurring. There is one thing that is occurring that I feel is very serious and that is a problem that you are beginning to hear about more and more frequently all the time. It is generally called the "Y2K" problem, or the "millennium bug." Briefly, it is a software problem for computers, and it is playing havoc with men's dreams about the future and the impact that it may have on the economic material well-being. There are very wide speculations that are being made regarding the impact that it is going to have upon American life, all the way from being nothing more than a speed bump on the road to prosperity to (as one man said) the single most serious economic problem that has ever happened on earth.

Now you can take your pick, because everybody is speculating to some degree, but the fact that something is going to happen I think is beyond question. Something **is** going to happen, and it is not good. It may change your life forever economically. Your life may never be the same after the year 2000 begins. It is just possibly that serious.

I will have to devote more time to that, and I will try to organize something to give a sermon in that regard, but I do want you to begin to think seriously about taking steps to prepare yourself physically, along with the spiritual preparation, because as I was showing you, God **does** require that if we see danger coming, whether it is war, whether it is economics, or whatever, He expects us to **do** something to begin to take care of ourselves and others, our loved ones—our family members, church members, our neighbors, whatever—to begin to get prepared while we can so that we are not caught completely unaware when that day comes.