

Illustrated Bible Life

Be Ready

Mount Vesuvius, a volcano in Italy, famously erupted with little warning in AD 79, destroying nearby cities, including the Roman city of Pompeii, which lay about six miles from the base of the mountain. At the time, there were between 10,000 and 20,000 inhabitants, a substantial size for an ancient city.

Although it is difficult to estimate just how many died, about 1,150 bodies have been found in the ruins of Pompeii. The city lay undisturbed under the ash until the late 16th century, when it was rediscovered. It has been extensively excavated and is remarkable for its state of almost perfect preservation.

In 2023, archaeologists began excavating what appears to have been a bedroom. Along with furniture, it contained the bodies of a woman and a man. The woman was lying near a bed with some valuables scattered where she fell: gold, silver, and bronze coins; and a pair of gold and pearl earrings. The man had been crushed by a wall near a doorway. They had evidentially tried to collect a few valuable belongings before they fled, not realizing they were already too late to escape the destruction of their home.

After the initial eruption of Mount Vesuvius, many people in the surrounding towns and villages had the wisdom to abandon their homes immediately and were likely saved by their prompt action. Although this pair might have had a chance to escape if they had left earlier, trying to collect their valuables probably was not the cause of their deaths—they had simply put off too long that escape from the inevitable.

The eruption was unexpected, and the first 18 hours were probably marked by a phenomenon called “pumice rain,” small, crushed rocks falling from the sky after the eruption. Many may have stayed in the shelter of their homes to protect themselves from the falling debris. Perhaps they thought that would be the worst of it and too late discovered that the lava flows would reach them where they sheltered, or that the ash would clog the air, making it impossible to breathe.

In Matthew 24:42, we read, “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come.” In our unit on End Things, we are reminded that the great day of the Lord—the second coming of Christ—will come at a day and hour we cannot know. That time may be soon, or it may be far off in the distant future. “Only the Father” knows that hour (v. 36).

Yet, Jesus tells us not to be alarmed, but only to “be ready” (v. 44). God is in control, and as long as we keep our eyes on Him and faithfully carry out the mission of the kingdom in our days here on earth, we may rest assured that we will be ready when He comes.

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