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The Persecution of the Church Before the Coming of Christ



By Steven J. Hogan

~ A Saturday Morning Post #48 ~

As you probably know, I don't preach a prosperity gospel, where health and wealth are the primary objectives. There's no doubt God physically blesses Christians, but more importantly, He spiritually blesses us, giving us eternal life, and love, joy, peace, purpose and hope. During our time on earth, God has called us to serve Him, and to sacrifice and suffer for Him. Now this is not a popular message, especially in this country, but it's the truth, and I will not ignore it or skim over it. When you read the Bible, it's obvious that suffering and persecution are very big subjects.

Remember what Jesus said, *"A slave is not greater than his master. If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you"* (John 15:20). Think of what Peter said, *"For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example to follow in His steps... Since*

Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose" (1 Peter 2:21, 4:1). Then Paul told us, *"Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God."* Acts 14:22

As Christians we shouldn't be surprised when we are persecuted and suffer. Loving the Lord by living a holy life and speaking the truth will result in suffering. *"Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted"* (2 Timothy 3:12). But isn't it true that God has blessed the United States with the freedom of assembly, speech and religion, and therefore, Christians living in this country haven't been persecuted as much? When I read mission magazines or go online, it is obvious that it's a lot worse in Asia, Africa and the Middle East, where Christians are commonly mistreated, beaten, jailed and even killed. But you can see that persecution is getting worse in this country, and there will soon come a day when it will be just as bad here as these other places.

I say that because we now live in the end times, and the Bible clearly tells us that persecution will continue and then become great persecution the closer we get to the coming of Christ. In fact, this subject of persecution and suffering is part of every major Bible passage that speaks about events leading up to Christ's return. Jesus repeatedly tells us about it because He wants us to know what will be taking place, and to be ready and alert, and able to be joyfully and fearlessly serving Him.

Jesus says, *"Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of Me"* (Matthew 24:9). Jesus says, *"Those days will be a time of tribulation such as has not occurred since the beginning of creation"* (Mark 13:19. Jesus says, *"You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death"* (Luke 21:16). We all know Christians have been persecuted since the beginning days of the church, but these passages, along with Revelation 6:9-11, make it clear that it will escalate, will become severe, will climax, and go global,

particularly in the years right before the return of Christ.

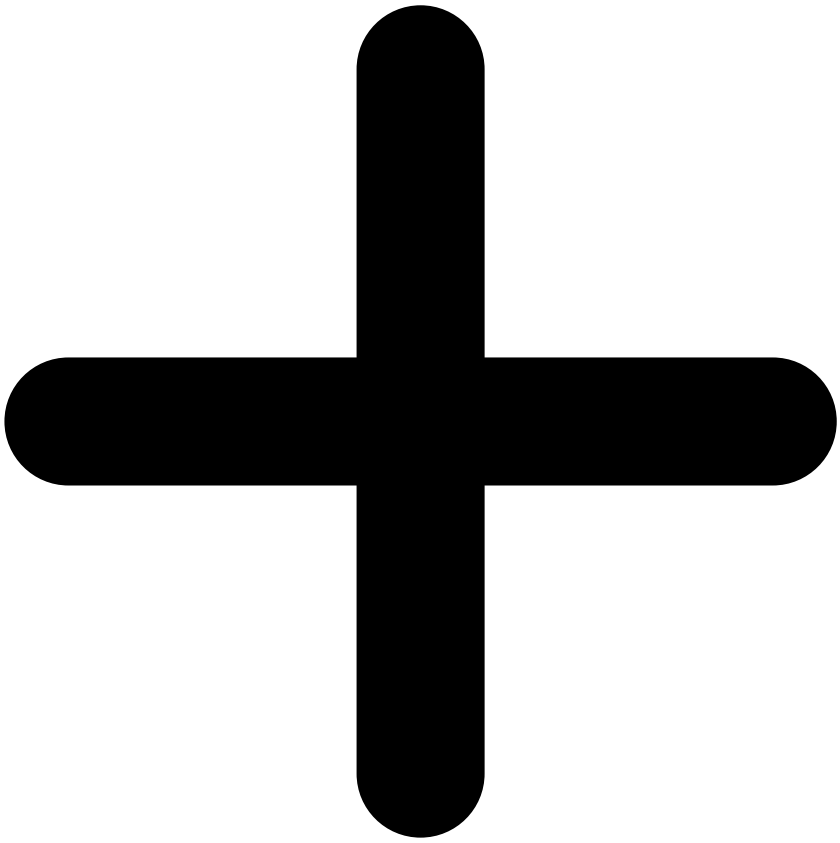
But how will this happen? At the midpoint of Daniel's 70th week, the Antichrist is revealed and, having taken control of the world, he will unleash great persecution, first against the Jews and then against the Christians (Matthew 24:9-10, 15-26; Revelation 12:13-17). It won't just be government officials persecuting Christians, but former fellow church-goers coming after them as well – *"Many will fall away and will betray one another and hate one another"* (Matthew 24:10). But in my opinion, the worst will be when *"brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child, and children will rise up against parents and have them put to death."* Mark 13:12

The devil will be stirring up this great hate for God's people, and therefore deceived unbelievers will be going after innocent Christians, opposing them and trying to kill them. This will definitely be the most difficult time ever for Christians on this earth. Revelation 13:7 warns us, *"It was also given to him* (Antichrist) *to make war with the saints and to overcome them."* I know this is not a feel good message, but I have to tell you the truth – the church will be greatly persecuted before the coming of Christ. And we shall overcome!

How then are we to think about persecution and suffering? 1st, know that God is sovereign and will protect you (Romans 8:28-39). 2nd, remember Peter's instruction, *"Those who suffer according to the will of God shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right"* (1 Peter 4:19). 3rd, share the gospel. As Jesus said, *"They will lay their hands on you and will persecute you… It will lead to an opportunity for your testimony"* (Luke 21:13). 4th, *"Consider Him who endured such suffering by sinners against Himself so that you will not grow weary and lose heart"* (Hebrews 12:3). 5th, Jesus told us, *"Do not fear what you are about to suffer"* (Revelation 2:10). 6th, Paul wrote, *"God will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ."* 7th, as Paul said, *"Know what is the hope of His calling*

(Ephesians 1:18). 8th, remember Jesus' promise, *"Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness... rejoice and be glad for your reward in heaven is great!"* Matthew 5:10-12

P.S. The day of the Lord is coming soon – a catastrophic and devastating judgment upon this world. Here are three more posts that will help you understand what will be happening in the future, and how should you live – *"God Will Keep You Strong to the End"*, *"Truths You Need to Know About the End Times"*, and *"That Evil Antichrist and His Short Rule on Earth."*



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