

# Persecution - A Sign of the Times

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In Matthew 24 the disciples asked Jesus how they would know when the end of the world was coming. Jesus responded in verses 5-9 by saying, “For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many. And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end 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. 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.” Here, Jesus presents the truth that the end times will be marked with trials and tribulations.

When we look for the signs of the times it is relatively easy for us to see some: false doctrine abounds and many are deceived; daily we hear of wars and rumors of war; and earthquakes, hurricanes, and famines are all frequent signs that Christ will come again soon. All these which are beginnings of sorrows are easily recognizable in our times, but what about persecution? Sometimes it seems in our day and age that persecution is a thing of the past. We can attend church freely. We can confess our faith openly. We can even establish our own schools to provide our children covenant instruction. And the laws of the land forbid the state from intruding on any of these activities. When we compare our lot to the saints of the early church or of the reformation, who daily had to face the prospect of torture for these activities, we should thank God for these blessings. Yet we must heed Christ’s words, “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.” Persecution is not a thing of the past. There is persecution even today, and persecution will become more common as the return of Christ approaches.

Recently, you may have read about a great number of church burnings that have occurred in our country. These fires seem to be more likely to occur in predominantly African-American congregations and some of these fires were clearly set by racists. So in one sense these fires are a sign of the times in that they expose the hatred and rising up of nation against nation that characterizes the end times. This attitude of hatred must be deplored. But in another sense these fires represent another sign of the times, persecution. One aspect of this problem that has received virtually no attention—I read about it in the middle of the religion section in the Grand Rapids Press—is that church burnings are common in all types of congregations. In fact, this article claimed that insurance company statistics show that church buildings are more likely to be set on fire than any other type of building in our country. Clearly, there are forces seeking to destroy the cause of Christ’s kingdom, even in its visible manifestation. Persecution is a part of our society.

All this should not surprise us. Jesus told us this would occur, and we can expect that the level and intensity of this persecution will only increase as his return approaches. But this should not make us faint of heart. After all, Christ teaches in verse 9 above, that we are persecuted for his “name’s sake.” So let us endure persecution knowing that it brings glory and honor to God, and as verse 13 teaches, “he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.”

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