

The Eleventh Hour

A MANUAL OF PREPARATION FOR COMING PERSECUTION

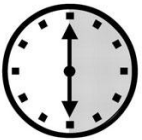
FOREWORD

This little book was originally written in 1994. For the most part, the message is of even greater relevance for the present time. However, some changes have been made to update the content. We pray the new printing will prove beneficial to those believers who choose to stand on the front lines of the spiritual conflict.

GENE CUNNINGHAM

“Endure hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.”
2 Timothy 2:3

**THE ELEVENTH HOUR:
A MANUAL OF PREPARATION FOR
COMING PERSECUTION**



It's six a.m. The alarm goes off, producing a sudden jolt into half awareness and a string of sensations: confusion (*Where is that noisy clock?*) ... disbelief (*Is it morning already?*) ... and irritation (*Do I have to get up and face this day with all its problems?*).

We've all experienced similar reactions to the early morning jangle of an alarm clock. And we all know how waking up can be painful if the night has been too short, or if the upcoming day offers only problems and difficulties. In many ways, this illustrates where Christians today find themselves. A shrieking alarm is telling us that we are living in the last period of Church history, but most believers are resisting the wake-up call because it's too painful or frightening. They are failing to heed Paul's warning in 1 Thess. 5:6, "*So then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober.*"

Across this land and around the world, Christian watchmen are sounding an alarm by questioning some rapid changes in politics, society, religion, and the economy:

- What is this "New World Order" that world leaders are talking about?
- Are the multitude of laws being rapidly pushed through our national and state legislatures designed to enslave us?
- Why do we need a "national police force" of 100,000 men?
- Are United Nations' forces already training on U. S. soil?
- Are the reports of over 40 detention centers located around this country true? Who is supposed to occupy them?
- Why do the news and entertainment media portray Christianity (and Christians) in such negative terms, while presenting other religions like Islam and the New Age Movement in a positive light?
- Why is anti-Semitism on the rise around the world?
- Why is interest in the occult (i.e., psychics, channelers, astrologers, etc.) increasing?
- Are we moving toward a cashless economic system? Why is this dangerous?

Credible spokesmen are providing specific answers to these and other disturbing questions about the times in which we live. And all their answers point to one conclusion: The world is being prepared for the rule of the Anti-Christ during the seven-year period of history called the Tribulation.

The Tribulation occurs during the last seven years of the Age of Israel, which was interrupted at Pentecost when the Church Age began. During the Tribulation, Satan will try to establish a one-world government under his rule; he will persecute the Jews as never before in history in an attempt to destroy them and prevent the Second Advent of Jesus Christ. But before the Tribulation begins, the Church Age must end.

Specifically, the Church Age will end with the Rapture of the Church (1 Thess. 4:15–17; 5:9). While “*no man knows the hour or the day*” (Matt. 24:36; Mark 13:32) when the Rapture will occur, there are numerous signs that point to the fact that we are now living in the “eleventh hour” of the Church Age; and as this Age closes, Christians will face an hour of testing that will both refine their faith and give maximum opportunity to be witnesses for Jesus Christ.

THE HOUR OF TESTING



“... Behold, I have put before you an open door which no one can shut, because you have a little power, and have kept My Word, and have not denied My name ... Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell upon the earth. I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, in order that no one take your crown” (Rev. 3:8–11).

This passage is part of a message directed to the “*angel [pastor] of the church in Philadelphia,*” a church characterized by its love for the Word of God and its missionary zeal. Although this passage tells us that they had only “*a little power,*” the Philadelphian believers were faithful to their witness for Jesus Christ. As a result, Christ promised that He would “*keep [them] from the hour of testing*” while opening the doors of evangelistic opportunity that no one would be able to close.

The importance of this passage for the Church today has largely been overlooked. Many pastors believe that—prophetically—the hour of testing refers to the Tribulation period when the Church is no longer on earth. But this interpretation ignores whom the promise is given to and what the Greek grammar reveals. First, the context makes it clear that this promise is given to Christians. Since the entire body of Christ will be taken to heaven at the Rapture of the Church (1 Thess 1:10; 4:13–15; 5:1–10; 1 Cor. 15:51–52), there won’t be any Christians in the Tribulation to receive this promise. Thus, the hour of testing must occur **before** Christians are taken up to heaven.

Second, the promise is NOT “I will keep you away from the hour of testing”—which would require the Greek preposition *apo*. Instead, Christ uses the preposition *ek*, which means “out of the midst of.” *Apo* would mean that these believers could expect deliverance BEFORE the hour of testing; *ek* means that they can expect deliverance DURING the hour of testing.

Third, the same Greek word for “keep” (*tereo*) is used in both the phrase “*because you have kept the word of My perseverance*” and the phrase “*I also will keep you from the hour of testing.*” *Tereo* means “to guard or protect in the presence of danger.” So, again, the Greek makes it clear that these faithful Christians can expect to be delivered through, not from, the hour of testing.

Finally, Paul uses the same preposition in speaking of God’s deliverance given to him in his trials and persecutions. Note 2 Timothy 3:11b, “... *what persecutions I endured. And out of them all the Lord delivered me.*” It is clear that Paul was delivered *through* not *from* those persecutions.

Consequently, I believe that the hour of testing is an indeterminate period of time preceding the Rapture and Tribulation, a period of great relevance to Christians because they will face the greatest period of persecution in Church history.

In Revelation 3:10–11, Jesus says that this hour is “*about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell upon the earth,*” and He commands believers to “*hold fast what you have, in order that no one take your crown.*” These statements show both the scope and purpose of this hour of testing. All over the world those who follow Jesus Christ will be persecuted for their faith. Yet Revelation 3:8 makes it clear that in this hour, Christ will open wide the door of mission opportunity so believers—as never before—can fulfill the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19; Acts 2:21; 3:16). Though faithful Christians will face great opposition (1 Cor. 16:9), they will have the opportunity to win an eternal crown, possibly the Crown of Joy (or soul-winner’s crown) spoken of in Philippians 4:1 and 1 Thessalonians 1:29.

Prophetically, the Philadelphian church represents the remnant of evangelistic, mission-minded believers living at the end of the Church Age who will boldly proclaim Jesus Christ to an increasingly hostile world. They are motivated to be faithful witnesses because they know who the real enemy is (Satan); they know what the real mission of the spiritual conflict is (to bring people to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ); and they know the only true grounds of victory (our position in Christ and our reliance on His power to deliver us).

These Philadelphian believers stand in sharp contrast to their spiritually apathetic “Laodicean” brethren (Rev. 3:14–22) who say, “*I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing ...*” [not knowing] *that [they] are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked*” (vs. 3:17). In our day, the Laodicean church represents the wealthy Western church, a church more concerned with tending to its comfort than in reaching the world for Christ. Unlike churches in Africa, India, Russia, and the Far East, the Western Church has been largely spared from persecution; in fact, many of its safe, contented members have deluded themselves by thinking that “it will never happen here.” They will be the first spiritual casualties—even traitors—when persecution hits!

The tragedy of the time in which we live is that most Christians have lost sight of the real objectives in the Christian life. Though well meaning, many believers are distracted by social, economic, and political problems. For instance, politically conservative Christians spend their energies fighting for the Constitution, for the Bill of Rights, against abortion, or against pornography. Liberal believers, on the other hand, are consumed with cleaning up the environment, fighting big business, instituting various social reforms, and fighting for women’s rights, gay rights, animal rights, etc.

But we need to remember this: Satan doesn’t care whether Christians are politically conservative or liberal. As long as he can get their eyes off of Jesus Christ as a solution to their problems, he has neutralized them in the conflict! So in the hour of testing, it is imperative that Christians keep their focus on Christ and not be sidetracked by attempts to “clean up the devil’s world.” We are here to be witnesses for Jesus Christ, not crusaders caught up in the affairs of this world. As the Apostle Paul reminded Timothy, “*No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier*” (2 Tim. 2:4).

What is most significant about this hour of testing is that it has already begun. During the Gulf War, world politicians spoke openly about a “New World Order”—a term which has come to mean a new era of international cooperation in solving problems—whether military aggression from tyrants like Saddam Hussein, civil war in Bosnia, or famine and disease in Third World countries. This “New World Order” offers a utopian vision for a peaceful, prosperous world; but in reality, it means the breakdown of the sovereignty of individual nations, a breakdown which must be accomplished for the Anti-Christ to establish his one-world government.

This proclamation of the New World Order is not something to fear; it is, instead, a call to battle for Christians committed to the cause and the commission of Jesus Christ! True to His Word, in these last days, God is opening wide the doors of evangelistic opportunity in miraculous ways. Areas of the globe long closed to the Gospel message are now accessible, as we see in Russia and Eastern Europe. The question for Christians is whether we will go through those doors:

- Will we exploit the opportunities at all cost?
- Will we reach out to the world with the soul-saving message of Jesus Christ—expending our time, energy, and resources without measure?
- Will we, as “Philadelphian commandos,” be prepared for the persecution to come?

In order to answer “Yes” to these questions, Christians must understand a number of biblical principles related to God’s plan for history, what He has commanded us to do, and His purpose behind persecution. Understanding these principles will help us prepare for the coming persecution and live our lives NOW as more effective witnesses for Jesus Christ.

One important note as you begin this study: When Jesus Christ spoke to His disciples about the “end times,” He told them that He was teaching them these truths so that they wouldn’t be surprised and wouldn’t be afraid (Matt. 24:6). This is the attitude we need to adopt: Don’t fear what is on the horizon. Instead, have confidence in God’s sovereign control of human history and His plans to bless your individual life! Remember Romans 8:28, “*and we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.*” Note that this verse comes in a context about suffering!

THE DIVINE PLAN FOR HUMAN HISTORY

The grounds of the believer’s victory were laid out in the eternal plan of God. God has an invincible strategy for human history, and the focal point of His strategy is the Cross of Christ. As Christians, we must understand that it is not our role to win the victory—the victory has already been won by Jesus Christ! God the Father revealed His invincible strategy for human history in two conversations with the Son—the Incarnation conversation and the Ascension conversation.

THE INCARNATION CONVERSATION: TO SEEK AND SAVE THE LOST

The Incarnation conversation took place at the virgin birth when the second member of the Godhead became flesh (Psalm 2:7, quoted in Hebrews 1:5): “*thou are My Son, Today I have begotten Thee.*” On the day Jesus was born, the heavenly Father revealed His eternal plan, which called for Jesus Christ, the God-Man, to win the victory over sin and death for us. Hebrews 2:14–15 declares that, “*since then the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him [Satan] who had the power of death, that is the devil and might deliver those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives.*”

The Son’s response to the Father’s plan for saving mankind is given in Hebrews 10:5–7 (a quote from Psalm 40:6–7): “*...Sacrifice and offering thou hast not desired, but a body Thou hast prepared for Me; in whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin Thou hast taken no pleasure ... ‘Behold, I have come ... to do Thy will, O God.’*” The context of this passage deals with the ineffectiveness of animal sacrifice for salvation: “*For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins*” (Heb. 10:4). In Old Testament times, priests use the Levitical sacrifices to teach God’s plan of redemption to Israel. These blood offerings were not the means of salvation; they only anticipated the saving work of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, while He was on the Cross.

Since God cannot have contact with sin, and since God cannot die, Jesus Christ had to step down from heaven (2 Cor. 8:9; Phil. 2:5–9) and become a man so He could become our Savior. As He walked this earth for 33

years, He dined with, prayed for, laughed with, cried over, taught, healed, forgave, and saved sinful men and women. This was His mission, as He Himself declared in Luke 19:10: *“The Son of Man has come to seek and save that which was lost.”* During His sojourn on this earth, He was tested and tempted as all people are, yet far beyond what we experience because He is the unique God-Man. Yet in all that time, He never sinned (see Heb. 2:18, 4:15, 5:8–9).

It was only on the Cross—as He was being judged for all the sins committed in human history—that He experienced sin firsthand. Second Corinthians 5:21 says, *“God made Him [Christ] become sin for us, though He knew no sin, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”* When Jesus Christ cried out, *“My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?”* (Matt. 27:46), He was expressing the anguish of judgment from God for our sins. But when He cried out, *“It is finished”* (John 19:30), He was proclaiming His victory over Satan, sin, and death—a victory that opened the way for the reconciliation between God and man (Rom. 5:8–11; 2 Cor. 5:17–21).

What made Jesus Christ willing to endure the Cross? Hebrews 12:2 tells us that it was *“for the joy set before Him [that He] endured the cross, despising the shame ...”* I believe that Jesus Christ found joy in anticipating how He could share eternal life—and all the blessings of the kingdom of God—with those who believe in Him (John 1:12, 3:16; Acts 16:31). In other words, if you are a child of God, He not only had you in mind as He paid the debt for your sins, but the thought of your presence in eternity gave Him strength to endure the Cross!

Jesus Christ’s reward for following the Father’s plan for the Incarnation is seen in Psalm 2:8, *“Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Thine inheritance, and the very ends of the earth as Thy possession.”* Thus, not only did Jesus Christ defeat Satan, sin, and death at the cross, He also regained the dominion of the earth lost by Adam in the Garden of Eden. We see the implications of His victory in a second message between God the Father and God the Son—the Ascension Conversation.

THE ASCENSION CONVERSATION: OPERATION FOOTSTOOL

The Ascension conversation took place 40 days after Jesus walked out of His own tomb and ascended into the presence of the Father. At that moment, God the Father said to the Son, *“[Sit] at My right hand, until I make Thine enemies a footstool for Thy feet”* (Heb. 1:13; Psa. 110:1). Though Jesus Christ won the war, He has not yet claimed His prize. The word *“until”* signifies that He will remain seated in heaven until “Operation Footstool” is complete; then, Jesus Christ will arise and come for His Church at the Rapture (1 Thess. 4:13–18).

The “Footstool” concept comes from an ancient battlefield tradition where the conquering king would place his foot on the neck of his defeated foe (Josh. 10:24–26; 2 Sam. 22:41). These passages make it clear that Christ’s enemies are made His footstool during the Church Age; the question is “How?” Christ gave us the answer in Acts 1:8, *“You shall be My witnesses”* and in Matthew 28:19, *“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations.”* While the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ is the victory, the preaching of the Gospel message (1 Cor. 15:1–4) is the means of spreading that victory. Thus, as Christians proclaim the Gospel, we subdue God’s enemies.

How many Christians today are subduing Christ’s enemies under His feet? Unfortunately, not very many. Most believers don’t know their purpose for living; few understand that they are born again into a spiritual battle for the souls of men and women. They don’t understand that every unbeliever in the world is a prisoner-of-war held by Satan, and that every Christian is to be a “divine commando” on a rescue mission. For when an unbeliever trusts in Jesus Christ as Savior, Satan feels the Lord’s foot on his neck!

No one knows how long the Church Age will last, how long it will take for Operation Footstool to be finished, or how long it will be before Jesus Christ returns to claim His victory prize, the Church. But a very ancient teaching from Psalm 110:1 and Colossians 2:5 holds that the number of believers in the Church Age would

equal the number of Satan's fallen angels. So when the last person is led to Jesus Christ, He will stand up and call His Church home.

Until the Rapture occurs, believers have a mission to fulfill. We must study, prepare, equip, and train ourselves so we can communicate the message of the Gospel clearly and simply—especially now in the hour of testing. In this hour, Jesus Christ has promised that He will give faithful, motivated believers *“an open door which no one can shut”* (Rev. 3:8). The issue, therefore, is never opportunity, but our willingness to participate in the battle and share in the victory through our obedience to God's Word.



THE DIVINE IMPERATIVES

God's strategy for human history carries with it three divine imperatives, one for the unbeliever and two for the Christian. To the unsaved, Acts 4:12 declares, *“and there is salvation in no one else [than Jesus Christ]; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we [MUST] be saved.”* Jesus Christ said of Himself, *“I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me”* (John 14:6). And Paul and Silas answered the most important question a man can ask—*“Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”*—with the simplest of instructions: *“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved ...”* (Acts 16:30–31). Thus, no unbeliever can hope to gain eternal life apart from obedience to the divine command to trust in Jesus Christ. The consequences of disobedience to the first divine command are high: *“He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him”* (John 3:36).

Once we have placed our faith in Jesus Christ, there are hundreds of commands in Scripture that we are supposed to obey. But in Matthew 22:37–39, Jesus Christ identified the two greatest: *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind ... [and] you shall love your neighbor as yourself.”* First, we demonstrate our love for God by obeying His commandments (John 1:21), not grudgingly or mechanically, but from a genuine appreciation for how He has loved us.

AS YOU READ THIS, IF YOU HAVE NEVER TRUSTED IN JESUS CHRIST AS YOUR PERSONAL SAVIOR, YOU CAN DO SO RIGHT NOW BY BELIEVING IN HIM. THE GOSPEL MESSAGE IS A SIMPLE ONE: *“CHRIST DIED FOR OUR SINS ... [AND] WAS BURIED, AND ... WAS RAISED ON THE THIRD DAY”* (1 Cor. 15:3–4). IF YOU BELIEVE THIS, THEN YOU HAVE ETERNAL LIFE.

The standard by which we love other people is best expressed in 1 Corinthians 13:4–8:

“Love is patient, love is kind, and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails ...”

Specifically, we demonstrate our love for unbelievers by proclaiming the Gospel message with both our lips and our lives, eagerly sharing the salvation we have received from God with them. Like Paul, we are compelled by our love for Jesus Christ to be effective witnesses, no longer living for ourselves, but living for Him (2 Cor. 5:14–15). We demonstrate our love for other Christians by our active participation in the Body of Christ. In Hebrews 10:24–25, we are commanded to assemble with other believers to encourage on another in *“love and good deeds.”* Jesus Christ wasn't a spiritual “Lone Ranger” attempting to live out the Father's plan in isolation. He was known for His love for other people, just as He said we would be known as His disciples by our love for one another (John 13:34–35).

As Christians, we can disobey the divine imperatives and live our lives outside of God's will. We can rest in our own hope of eternal life, which is grounded in Christ's love and faithfulness, even to the faithless (Rom.

8:38–39; 2 Tim. 2:13). But clearly, God wants us to choose the path of complete and total commitment to Him. We hear this in the words of Christ who said, “*If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s shall save it*” (Mark 8:34–35).

When we choose to obey God, we set our feet on a costly path. Jesus Christ told His disciples, “*A slave is not greater than his master. If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you ...*” (John 15:20). In 2 Timothy 3:10–12, Paul reminds Timothy of what his love and obedience to the Lord cost him, and what faithful believers can expect it to cost them:

“...[You] followed My teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, patience, love, perseverance, persecutions, and sufferings, such as happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium and at Lystra; what persecutions I endured, and out of them all the Lord delivered me! And indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”

To see how Paul was delivered, read Acts 13:48–52 (Antioch); Acts 14:1–5 (Iconium); and Acts 14:6–7 and Acts 19–22 (Lystra). In these passages, we see the increasing hostility Paul faced, leading step-by-step to his stoning. In what way, then, did God deliver Paul out of his afflictions? Not by keeping him **from** them, but by faithfully carrying him **through** them so he could accomplish Christ’s calling. While Paul uses his experience to warn Christians that they will face persecution, he emphatically declares that the Lord delivered him “*out of*” all his afflictions. The word “delivered” is *rhuomai*, a strong word that means “to rescue, to snatch out of.” Paul then uses the preposition *ek*, the same word found in Revelation 3:10, to show deliverance **through**, not **from** his afflictions.

Within the context of Paul’s story, we see two other statements that are also echoed in the promise of Revelation 3:10. After he was stoned in Lystra, Paul returned to the city and continued to preach, “*strengthening souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, ‘through many tribulations we must enter the Kingdom of God’*” (Acts 14:22). As a result of his faithfulness, Paul was able to testify how God “*had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles*” (Acts 14:27). Jesus Christ promises Christians living in the hour of testing the same “*open doors*” to witness for Him, even when the world hates and opposes us at every turn.

The doctrine of persecution is not a popular one in our day, especially in the Western Church, which has known such tremendous freedom of religion. And while more than 300,000 Christians a year die for their faith in other parts of the world, we in the West have foolishly denied that it can happen here. Western Christians are too often taught a “prosperity gospel” which falsely claims that God will “never let anything bad happen to His children.” This prosperity gospel appeals to those who want a faith that promises them everything and costs them nothing—not their freedom, their wealth, their reputations, their comfort, or their lives. Those who fall for this lie have only a superficial, self-seeking “faith”—one which cannot stand up to the realities of the spiritual combat in the devil’s world. These self-centered Christians choose to sit on the sidelines of the spiritual battle, remaining silent rather than risking the world’s censure. Satan is pleased with their passivity, for they are doing nothing to subdue Christ’s enemies under His feet!

In contrast, when we study the lives of faithful men and women throughout history and Scripture (such as those mentioned in Hebrews 11), we see how their faith was tested and refined by persecution. Repeatedly, the writers of Scripture teach that the world hated Jesus Christ and, therefore, hates all those who follow Him. But rather than seeing persecution as something to fear, they see it as a blessing. Paul writes that the believer has been “*granted for Christ’s sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake*” (Phil. 1:29). Peter asserts that those who “*suffer for the sake of righteousness ...are blessed.*” And he admonishes believers, “*do not fear ... [but] sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you ...*” (1 Pet. 3:14–15).

The path to loving God with all your heart, soul, and mind is a path through persecution, one where believers are assured that they can be victors—or overcomers—over the enemy. The key to victory is found in Revelation 12:11, “*And they overcame him [Satan] because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even to death.*”

First, believers have victory “*because of the blood of the Lamb*”—they have trusted Jesus Christ for eternal salvation. Second, they have victory “*because of the word of their testimony*”—they are witnesses to the truth of God’s Word. Finally, they have victory because “*they [do] not love their life even to death*”—they are willing to die for their faith rather than deny Jesus and escape persecution.

One of the most familiar “overcomers” in the New Testament is Stephen, the first martyr of the Church (Acts 7). After he made his appeal for his countrymen to believe in Jesus Christ, they began to stone him (Acts 7:54–60). Yet as they were killing him, he saw a vision of “*the Son of man standing at the right hand of God*” (Acts 7:56). Not seated, but standing in honor of his faithful witness! In this moment, God revealed through Stephen just what is required for Jesus’ enemies to be subdued: It takes fearless and effective evangelism, even at the cost of one’s life. This is the model Christians living in the hour of testing must keep in mind as we are given opportunities to be effective witnesses in an increasingly hostile world. We must also hold tenaciously to our belief that in God’s plan, persecution plays a vital role in our individual spiritual growth and in furthering the cause of Christ in the world.



THE PURPOSE OF PERSECUTION

“...[The] *people who know their God will display strength and take action. And those who have insight among the people will give understanding to the many ... And some of those who have insight will fall, in order to refine, purge, and make them pure, until the end time ...*” (Dan. 11:32–33, 35)

Though this passage refers to events in the Tribulation, its principles apply to Church Age believers. The context speaks of a severe persecution which will “*refine, purge, and make them [believers] pure*” (Dan. 11:35) and stimulate them to “*take action*” (Dan. 11:32). While it was Jesus’ master plan that the Gospel go forth from “*Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth*” (Acts 1:8), both Scripture and history testify to the fact that the early church was negligent in this task. But God had a plan to remedy their neglect.

Because of a zealous Pharisee named Saul of Tarsus, a severe persecution came about, with far-flung consequences for the early Church: “*Those who had been scattered went about preaching the Word*” (Acts 8:4). Later, after his encounter with Jesus on the Damascus road, Saul of Tarsus became the Apostle Paul, the driving force of first-century missions and the chief target of the persecutions he himself ignited.

Persecution has always purified the Church and spread the Gospel message. During times of persecution, all the petty arguments, divisions, and distractions within the Church lose their appeal. Under persecution, Christians realize the value of every member of the Body of Christ. Brothers and sisters in Christ then pull together to oppose their real enemy, Satan. And when this happens the world is treated to the greatest witness of all—the love of Jesus Christ as manifested through His followers: “*By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another*” (John 13:35).

As the New World Order opens a floodgate of persecutions against Christians, the Church will be refined and individual believers will come to know the Lord in a deeper way. Out of their spiritual intimacy with Christ, these believers will “*display strength*” from the Spirit of God, and they will “*take action*” so as to “*give insight to many*” in the way of salvation.

Daniel 12:3 offers these encouraging words to this faithful remnant: *“And those who have insight will shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.”* In order to be such a shining example of Christ, we must make our decisions NOW to prepare for what is about to take place. We must be willing to be refined so that we will have a greater zeal for lost souls. Living in these times of increasing spiritual darkness, we should all desire to mightily display the glorious light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to every person we come into contact with.



PREPARATION FOR PERSECUTION

If you accept that persecution is coming, the question then is, how can you prepare? Many people today are making “survival precautions”: stockpiling food and water, medicines, weapons and ammunition—even building survival retreats. While these may have value if you are preparing for social upheaval or warfare, they do NOT relate to preparing for persecution. Preparation for persecution is spiritual, not material. It involves not the acquiring of material things, but the “letting go” of things—if only mentally. The only “stockpiling” that will count in the hour of testing takes place in the soul with the Word of God. Accordingly, there are several steps Christians can take to prepare spiritually.

1. BE CONTENT

In an unhappy world, Christians need to learn the power of being content. Paul calls contentment his “spiritual secret” in Phil. 4:11–13. The word “*secret*” in that passage speaks of personal insight and privileged information granted to a select few. The word *mueo* speaks of lessons learned through rigorous preparation and initiation too demanding for most. Consider the list Paul gives in 2 Corinthians 11:23–33 as a few of the rites of initiation he went through. Paul was beaten, stoned, shipwrecked, and imprisoned; he was in constant danger from both men and nature; and he was hungry, thirsty, and cold more often than he could count. Yet in everything, he was content.

Contentment is learned from God; and it develops as we learn to trust in the Person, plan, and promises of God. God loves us infinitely (Eph. 2:4); His plan always works for our good (Rom. 8:28); and His promises are certain (Heb. 6:17–19). These truths lay a foundation for our contentment. Ultimately, being content means possessing a “spiritual self-sufficiency” by which we can, through God’s grace and strength, adapt to any circumstance (Phil. 4:13; 1 Tim. 6:6–8).

2. FOCUS ON THE SPIRITUAL

As believers, we live in a paradox that expresses both our physical and spiritual natures. We are “*in the world but not of the world*” (John 17:11, 16). We must live as “*citizens of heaven*” (Phil. 3:20), but as “*strangers and aliens*” on this earth (1 Pet. 2:11). Accordingly, each of us knows just how difficult it is to keep our focus on spiritual values and objectives when the daily pressures of life crowd in and demand our immediate attention. We must spend time working to earn enough money to feed, clothe, and shelter our families; we must spend time developing relationships by demonstrating our love to family members and friends. Often, our daily list of “things to do” threatens to crowd out our time of prayer and fellowship with God. Thus, we have to make a disciplined, faithful effort each day to take refuge in God so we can be restored, refreshed, and refocused spiritually.

Focusing on the spiritual means keeping our eyes on Jesus Christ (Heb. 12:2) and living daily in the Word of God. We must seek His presence in prayer, study His life in the Gospels, and conform to His character as revealed in the Epistles. We should also memorize Scripture for personal comfort and witnessing.

What if you were locked in a detention camp, as I believe many in our generation will be? Without a Bible, what would you remember of the Word of God to give you strength? What would you call forth from the recesses of your soul as a witness to others? Preparation demands stockpiling the Word of God, as we see demonstrated by the writer of Psalm 119, who spoke so eloquently about the sustaining power of God's Word while he was a prisoner of the Babylonians: *"Thy Word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path"* (Psa. 119:105) ... *"The wicked have laid a snare for me, yet I have not gone astray from Thy precepts"* (Psa. 119:110) ... *"Thou art my hiding place and my shield; I wait for Thy Word"* (Psa. 119:114).

When we hurt, the healing salve of God's remembered Word soothes our troubled souls. God speaks and comforts us through His Word, and we learn to be a comfort to others (2 Cor. 1:3-5). As we spend our days focusing on the spiritual, we are laying up resources that will both comfort others and us in the difficult days ahead.

3. BE SENSITIVE TO THE SPIRIT OF GOD

When Elijah was at Mt. Horeb, he heard the *"still, small voice of God"* (1 Kings 19:12). I am convinced that our spiritual stability and effectiveness in the coming days will require that we, too, be able to hear that voice. Can you discern the Spirit's voice from all the confusion of public opinion and the well-meaning counsel of friends and family? It is essential that you be able to. But this sensitivity can only be developed over time through day-by-day intimacy with the Lord.

How do we cultivate a spirit sensitive to the Spirit of God? Through the filling of the Holy Spirit, which empowers us; through spending time in God's Word, which transforms us; and through prayer and meditation, which enables us to "get quiet" long enough to hear His voice. We must learn to pray and seek His guidance in all areas of our lives—remembering that nothing is too small or insignificant for God to care about, or too large for Him to be troubled by.

As we seek His leading, the Holy Spirit will make us sensitive to circumstances so that we will be able to make good decisions in times of crisis. He will enable us to decide quickly and decisively when to take a stand, when to flee, where to go. Answers to these types of questions can only come from the Spirit of God to each individual. In the days ahead, you won't be able to live according to some neatly defined list of dos and don'ts. Therefore, you must develop by prayer, study, and practice deep spiritual sensitivity.

If we will seek it, the Holy Spirit will also make us sensitive to others—prompting our ministry to other people, bringing them to mind so we will pray for them, even if we don't know why we are praying. So for ourselves and for those we love, we must stay alert in order to fulfill our mission in the hour of testing: *"But keep on the alert at all times, praying in order that you may have strength to escape all these things that are about to take place..."* (Luke 21:36).

This sensitivity to the Spirit's leading will also give us peace—a rest for our souls—in the hour of testing. When we read the newspaper or watch the nightly news on television, it's easy to become angry and fearful. We see all the evil in our society, and we either want to hide from it or seek human viewpoint solutions that are doomed to fail. In our day, as never before, we need to remember that God is in control of human history, and that He is allowing evil to run its course. This doesn't mean that we're to be apathetic and unconcerned; but through our witness, we're to demonstrate our utmost concern for the fate of individuals who will be lost for all eternity without Jesus Christ.

4. ESCAPE AND EVADE

Matthew 10:16 and 23 say, *"Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; therefore be shrewd as serpents, and innocent as doves... But whenever they persecute you in this city, flee to the next..."* A sheep in the midst of wolves will be killed; its only chance for survival is through escape and evasion. So it is for the believer living in the devil's world. The Christian army is behind enemy lines, and our battle is one of wits, not

weapons: “*For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses*” (2 Cor. 10:3–4). We are engaged in unconventional warfare; and we must think “escape and evade” like Christians in the early Church—or like believers today living under hostile political and religious regimes.

In our day, the Western Church is suffering from the “Christian celebrity syndrome” where believers seek to publicize all that they do. They don’t understand how publicity works for the enemy, how increased attention brings increased opposition. Instead, they need to keep a low profile, quietly fighting for the souls of men one soul at a time.

If escape and evasion sounds like cowardice, then consider some biblical examples. Mark 3:5–7 is just one incident where Jesus used escape and evasion tactics when His enemies sought to kill Him. In 2 Corinthians 11:32–33, Paul escaped by being lowered down the wall in a basket. And in Acts 16:16–21, we see how Paul avoided attracting attention by casting a loudmouth demon out of a slave girl. Escape and evasion is not cowardice, but wisdom. Our goal is not survival, but living to fight another day on another battlefield until the Lord tells us to stop. However, we must draw the line firmly in our minds that we NEVER, EVER, deny Jesus Christ so as to escape persecution! Remember, in the Garden of Gethsemane, Christ did not try to escape His enemies—He allowed Himself to be arrested and then crucified so “*...the Scriptures of the prophets [could] be fulfilled*” (Matt. 26:56). If we have lived our lives committed to God’s call and sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit, we will—like Jesus—know when to use escape and evasion tactics and when to stand. And like Christ we will, if necessary, be witnesses unto death for the greater glory of God.

5. SIMPLIFY YOUR LIFE

The biblical word for “single-mindedness” is related to simplicity. To be single-minded, we must simplify our lifestyle. This does not mean we’re to become ascetics, giving up all of life’s comforts. But there are multitudes of ways—great and small—in which we can simplify our lives. The benefits are as far-reaching as eliminating mental stress, developing a healthier lifestyle, and having greater economic freedom. Consider a few examples:

- Instead of driving, walk to the store or ride a bicycle to work.
- Instead of an expensive night out on the town, let your recreation be walking, conversing with friends, or reading a good book.
- Instead of buying useless junk, get things that are useful, and buy good quality that lasts.
- Instead of filling up on junk foods and soft drinks, eat more fresh fruits and vegetables, and drink water.

American Christians seem to have no trouble building bigger, better churches, driving the latest cars, and enjoying an endless round of social and recreational activities. Yet believers in Africa and India meet outside with one or two Bibles to a congregation. To me, this is a disgrace! And I firmly believe that God will soon teach American Christians how to live in privation, as our brothers and sisters in Third World countries know so well.

6. FOLLOW DAILY DISCIPLINES

America is an unfit nation because we seem to have forgotten the value of discipline in all areas of life. But the wonderful thing about discipline is that consistency—not intensity—pays the greatest rewards, so the key to being fit is following “daily” disciplines. To be spiritually fit, you must daily study God’s Word, pray, and serve according to your spiritual gift. To be physically fit, you need a program of good diet, exercise, and rest that you follow consistently. You don’t have to become a fitness addict; but a regular pattern of exercises (for example, walking 20–30 minutes a day) can yield great health benefits for anyone. To be economically free, learn to buy not what you want, but only what you need. In an advertisement-saturated society, you may have to adjust your thinking to determine the difference between wants and needs! In times of economic upheaval, “the debtor is slave to the lender,” thus, it is wise to get out of debt as quickly as you can.

7. IDENTIFY LIKE-MINDED BELIEVERS

We all benefit by the strengths—and help compensate for the weaknesses—of other believers; this is the idea behind “fellowship” in the local church. Hebrews 10:24–25 says, “...*let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encourage one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near.*” The issue is not a ritual attendance in your local church once or twice a week. The issue is fellowship, establishing genuine friendships and co-ministries with other like-minded Christians.

Never will Christian fellowship be more important than in the hour of testing when, I believe, the “Philadelphian” church may become a home-based, underground church so common in Church history. Never will our relationships with other Christians be more valuable; but never will they be more potentially dangerous since many will betray one another to save themselves (see Matt. 24:10).

Where do you find other like-minded believers? Hopefully, in your local church. Pastors, leaders, Sunday school teachers, members of your home Bible-study class, your prayer group, or the missions’ committee—wherever there are people in your church using their spiritual gifts in ways big and small. Seek them out, strike up a conversation, and become a co-laborer in their ministry.

But you may find, as Jesus did, that like-minded believers are often found outside “religious” circles. It wasn’t the Pharisees and the Sadducees who flocked to Christ, but the “street people” of His day. So much so that He was known by His critics as the friend of the prostitutes, tax collectors, and sinners! Don’t limit yourself to cultivating friendships only among churchgoers. Realize that many Christians today do not attend a local church. While some stay away because of spiritual apathy and indifference, others have been driven out of local churches by attitudes of self-righteousness and judgmentalism. Many of these believers want to study God’s Word, desire to serve God, and love Jesus Christ—they just don’t trust churches. Some are rough-cut and unpolished, perhaps living in a sub-culture or on society’s fringes; so your first reaction may be to avoid them. But if you are flexible enough, you may develop an appreciation for those who “don’t fit” in the days ahead. Why? Because the “street smarts” of some of God’s scruffy children just may be the key to your daily survival! When your safety or daily food depends on someone who has lived in life’s rough lane, you will then be able to look beyond the unwashed face and dirty clothes to see the pure, clean soul and genuine love of one of God’s children.

8. BE PERCEPTIVE

We must all be able to see beyond circumstances of warfare, social and economic collapse, or even imprisonment to see the plan of God at work in our lives. From his Roman prison cell, Paul wrote in Philippians 1:12, “*Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for greater progress of the gospel.*” The great Apostle was able to see God’s hand at work in **every** circumstance. Isn’t this what Genesis 50:20 and Romans 8:28 mean? God designs everything in our lives for blessing; we must believe this truth even when the surface of life seems to contradict it.

Throughout history, faithful men and women have been afflicted; and yet they have found in their afflictions a spiritual insight and intimacy with the Lord not possible in peaceful circumstances. Job testifies to this when he says, “*I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear; but now my eye sees Thee*” (Job 42:5). And the captive who wrote Psalm 119 saw this in verses 71 and 75: “*It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I may learn Thy statutes ...I know, O Lord, that Thy judgments are righteous, and that in faithfulness Thou has afflicted me.*”

One prisoner wrote me recently stating how blessed he felt to be in prison where, undistracted by the world, he could study and grow in the Word of God. He said, “This is the freest I’ve ever been!” Even returning prisoners of war have testified to missing the single-minded spiritual perception which prison camp enforced on them. Many excellent books written by Christians reveal how they endured Nazi, Japanese, Russian, and

Vietnamese prison camps. I highly recommend that you begin to collect and study these books because the lessons these men and women learned may one day prove priceless.

9. LEARN TO ENDURE

Adversity wears many faces: crushing circumstances beyond our control, opposition and hostility from people, physical illnesses, disappointments in our careers or in our relationships, even the life-shattering consequences of our failures. How do we find victory—even joy—in the midst of life’s trials? We must learn to endure.

If there is a single key to victory in the Christian life, especially during the hour of testing, it is endurance. Endurance is a key factor in our spiritual growth (Rom. 5:1–5), in our receiving blessings in time (Heb. 10:36; James 5:11), and in our receiving eternal rewards (James 1:12). For these reasons, the writers of Scripture saw the trials of faith that produce endurance as something to rejoice in, not fear. James 1:2–3 says, *“Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of you faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”*

When God allows adversity in our lives, the one thing He wants to see in us is endurance; for in enduring, we please Him (Heb. 10:38). Too often, we only want to be delivered **from** our problems. Instead, we must understand that it is God’s job to deliver us **through** them. It is our job to endure until He does.

How do we build endurance? Isaiah 40:31 tells us that, *“...those who wait for the Lord will gain new strength; they will mount up with wings like eagles, they will run and not get tired, they will walk and not become weary.”* The word for “wait” is *qawah*, the strongest Hebrew word for faith. It’s a word picture for making rope: frail, easily broken threads are woven together into unbreakable cords. *Qawah*—or waiting on the Lord—is the endurance we develop as we weave together promises, principles, and doctrines from the Word of God into an unbreakable rope of faith. We endure, therefore, by exercising our faith in who and what God is. In the midst of our trials—especially when we are confused about what God is doing—we must steadfastly *“walk by faith, not by sight”* (2 Cor. 5:7). We can only endure if we trust in God’s love for us (Rom. 8:38–39), in His steadfast presence (Psa. 23:4; Isa. 41:10; Heb. 13:5), and in His desire for our ultimate blessing (Jer. 29:11; Rom. 8:28).

We must also understand that endurance is only built up by going beyond our limits. While God promises never to give us more than we can bear (1 Cor. 10:13), He will bring us to an end of our human strength and security to a place where we must rely solely on His power and provision. When we rely on God, we become spiritually invincible in the battle. Our lines of communication with the Father can never be cut, our lines of supply can never run dry, and the enemy can never defeat us. When we rely on God, we *“overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us”* (Rom. 8:37).

In the hour of testing, it is imperative that we follow the examples of so many “heroes of faith” who have preceded us in the battle. Hebrews 11 is filled with such examples; but one of the most familiar is Moses, who by faith, chose to *“endure ill-treatment with the people of God...[rather] than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin”* and who *“endured, as seeing Him who is unseen”* (Heb. 11:24–27). We must follow the admonition found in Hebrews 12:1–2, *“... let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith...”* The only path to victory in the spiritual battle, joy in this life, and rewards in eternity, is the path of endurance!



CONCLUSION

In Matthew 24, Jesus' disciples asked him about events that would signal "*the end of the age.*" His reply was a warning for them not to be misled and not to fear—one of the most repeated commands in Scripture. Faith leaves no room for fear; therefore, don't be afraid of what you might have to face in the hour of testing. Whatever occurs, remember that these things **MUST** happen as the Church Age comes to a close. Simply trust God, who has guaranteed victory to those who will rely on Him:

“Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by My name; you are Mine! When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they will not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched, nor will the flame burn you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.” (Isa. 43:1–3)