

# Charleston Attack: When God Is at Work, Satan Reacts

“There is no greater coward than a criminal who enters a house of God and slaughters innocent people engaged in the study of Scripture.” So said NAACP President and CEO Cornell William Brooks, condemning Wednesday night’s shooting in Charleston, South Carolina.

Emanuel AME Church, the scene of the attack, is historically African-American, tracing its roots to 1816. One of its founders tried to organize a slave revolt in 1822; white landowners had his church burned in revenge. Members worshipped underground until after the Civil War. Wednesday’s shooting took the life of the church’s pastor and eight others, and has been labeled a hate crime (For more, see Nick Pitts’s article *Tragedy in Charleston*).

Wherever God is at work, Satan reacts. His first strategy is “to steal and kill and destroy” (John 10:10). When Jesus’ movement gained a national following, Satan led Judas to betray our Lord (John 13:2, 27). When Peter preached at Pentecost and 3,000 were converted, Satan incited the religious authorities to arrest them and demand that they cease preaching (Acts 4). When Paul’s ministry reached global status, Satan led the authorities to arrest and eventually behead him.

More people are coming to Christ today than at any time in human history, and Satan is again responding through violence. According to John Allen, longtime Vatican journalist, 80 percent of all acts of religious discrimination around the world are directed at Christians. Ninety percent of all religious martyrs are Christians. Terror attacks against Christians escalated 309 percent between 2003 and 2010.

Persecution is strongest where the kingdom is advancing the fastest. In the Muslim world, where more have come to Christ in the past 15 years than the previous 15 centuries, attacks on Christians are more common than ever before. *Newsweek* recently reported: "In recent years the violent oppression of Christian minorities has become the norm in Muslim-majority nations stretching from West Africa and the Middle East to South Asia and Oceania." The magazine then stated, "The conspiracy of silence surrounding this violent expression of religious intolerance has to stop." (For more, see my book *Respected to Irrelevant to Dangerous*.)

Persecution against Christians is increasing in China, where as many as 100,000 people come to Christ every day. It is increasing in sub-Saharan Africa, where as many as 28,000 come to Christ daily. It is increasing in Cuba, where more than a million have come to Christ in the last decade. The pattern is clear.

How can we pray for our persecuted brothers and sisters? Acts 12:5 tells us that after Peter was arrested by Herod, "earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church." Their intercession was passionate: "earnest" translates *ektenos*, fervent, zealous. It was continual: "prayer was made" is in the imperfect tense, literally "prayer was constantly being made." It was specific: "for him." And it was collective: "by the church."

God is calling his people to pray passionately, continually, specifically and collectively for Emanuel AME Church and for all who are risking their lives to follow Jesus. And he has calling us to pray in the same way for the spiritual awakening we desperately need.

Charles Spurgeon: "I know of no better thermometer to your spiritual temperature than this, the measure of the intensity of your prayer." What is your spiritual temperature today?

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