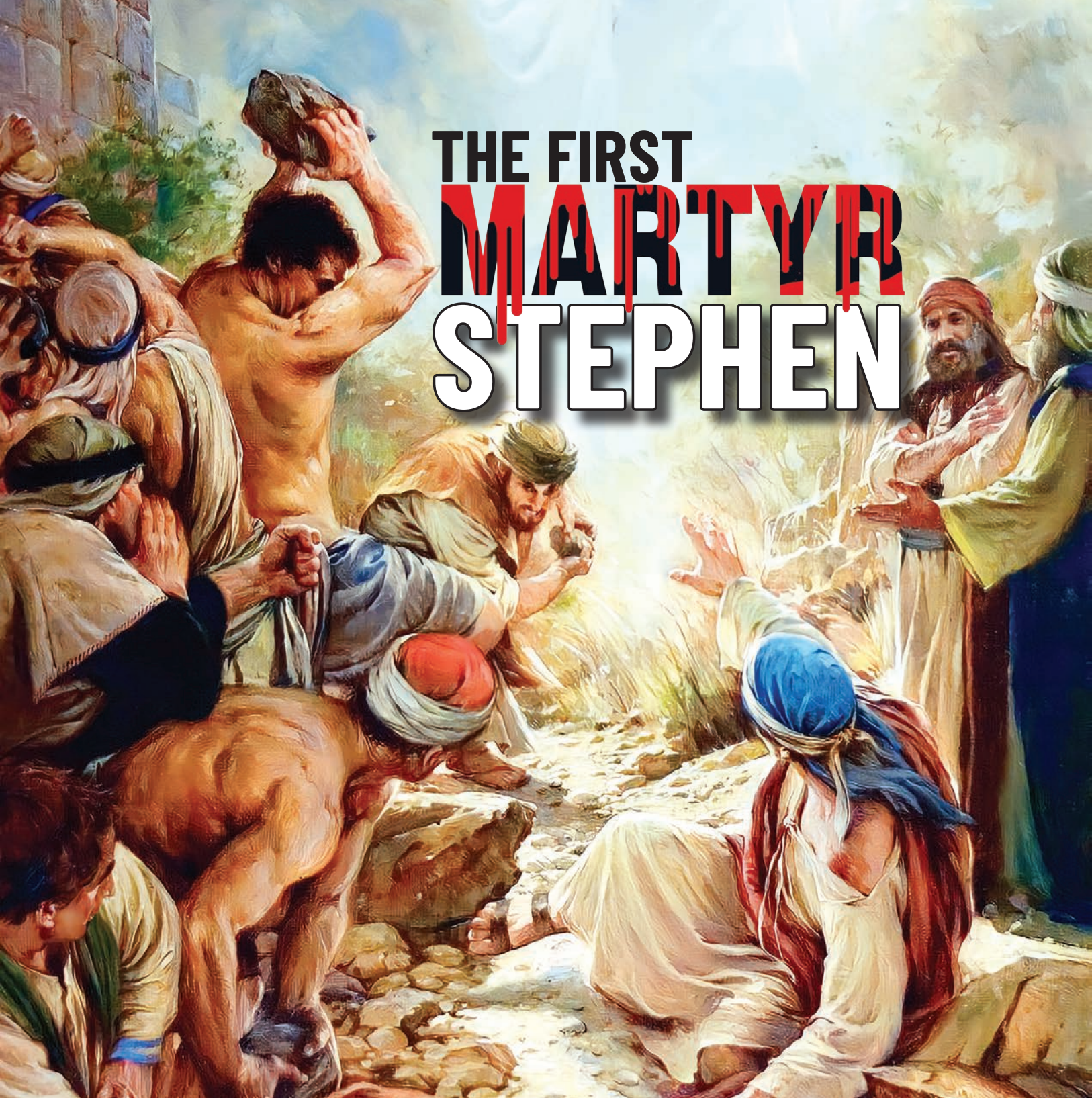


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Vol. 18, Issue No. 11 | 2023 November | Hebron, Kumbanad, Kerala | www.revivemegod.org



THE FIRST MARTYR STEPHEN



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What is the Christian response to persecution?

This question has great importance for us today. In the past few years and especially since the new government, India's Christian community has experienced more and more persecution than any other time since independence 1947.

Increasingly, we hear stories of Christians beaten, raped, and killed. Militants burn churches, raid prayer meetings, and destroy Bibles. Even in the state of Kerala where Christians comprise 20% of the population, Hindu radicals attack Christians in a kind of "ethnic cleansing". Propaganda machines foment hatred, accusing Christians of "lies", "destroying civilization" and following a man (Jesus Christ) who "is a dark force risen from the lowest depths of human nature."

In the meantime, the police watch, do nothing, and even join the hatemongers. State and central governments often offer no help and make no statements to calm hatred and restore order.

As followers of Jesus Christ, how are we to regard all of this? I believe we should look to the Bible, to the writings of a man who both persecuted and endured great persecution. I speak of the Apostle Paul. He writes to the Thessalonians, who suffered Persecution because of their faith:

"Therefore, we ourselves speak proudly of You among the churches of God for Your Perseverance and faith in the midst of all your Persecutions and afflictions which You endure. This is a Plain indication of God's righteous judgment so that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God for which you are suffering."

Note that Paul commends the Thessalonians in their sufferings. They have been tested in the fire for their faith. The sense of Paul's words is that all who love the Lord will experience this testing. Scars of affliction are the hallmark of our humanity as Christians on this earth. Affliction is a result of our weakness and the uncertainty of life in a world not fully surrendered to God.

In a sinful world, People defy their Creator. They worship other gods and give themselves to godless Passions. Persecution is what rebels do to those who give up their rebellion against God.

The Thessalonians were only one group of people to whom Paul ministered. At different times, with Silas and Timothy, Paul shared the gospel with Jews and Greeks. Wherever they went, large numbers turned from idols to serve the true and living God.

But everywhere, they faced fierce opposition. Why should this happen? They did not Plot to overthrow the Roman government. They did not incite civil disobedience or rebellion against any authorities. They only became excited over their new relationship with God. They had

A CHRISTIAN RESPONSE TO PERSECUTION

discovered His holiness, His Presence and His power. They had experienced His glory. They saw their Passions and desires change. They found the truth, and now they wanted to share it with neighbors, friends, and the whole world. They had only one Problem.

Their changed lives through Christ only revealed that others lived in error. This made others furious. What had believers done to offend? Nothing. It was the nature of Christianity that offended. The holiness of God had "rubbed off" onto them, and the rebels couldn't stand it. They did only what rebels do: they struck back. If they could not strike God, they would at least strike His children. Persecution became a sign that God was at work.

Persecution has always been the lot of God's People. Daniel the prophet faced Persecution because he took a stand to worship the true God. He believed God would be faithful to him, and he did not worry what would happen.

As a Young man, the Babylonians took him and his friends captives. They lost everything dear to them, including their names. But God blessed Daniel and gave him favor with his captors, so that the king even wanted to make him a ruler in his kingdom. This aroused the anger and jealousy of others who knew that this was the direct result of his relationship with God. They tried to destroy his relationship with God, and when that failed, they tried to destroy him.

Daniel was a Pilgrim and a stranger in a strange land. In a way, so are we. Though Christians have been in India for more than 2,000 years, we are now told by some that we are not citizens in our own homeland. But let us not feel sorry for ourselves. In us, these people only see the work of God with whom they cannot or will not reconcile.

Persecution cost Stephen his life, but it also helped to spread the church far and wide - and even converted the man who over saw his execution. Even as his persecutors stoned him to death, Stephen saw a vision of Jesus Christ so powerful and glorious, that even his terrible suffering could not keep him from rejoicing then pitying his killers and pleading to God for their forgiveness. Stephen's experience reminds us that during our greatest trial, Christ will also give us a vision to help us bear our sufferings. Even if persecution leads to death, we will know not humiliating death but comfort, glorious reward, and spread of the gospel.

These examples of faithful meant each us that if we love Jesus Christ and live lives of faith, we WILL face persecution as certain as the sun rises and sets. But persecution only means that our lives reveal God's life in us to others. When we stand for a righteous cause as did these Daniel and Stephen, God enables us to transcend the fear of death. We may not find deliverance in this life, but we shall find deliverance in the next.

Because we bear His Spirit, we have eternal life. Persecution cannot destroy eternal life in Christ's church, cannot undo our relationship with God. Nothing can destroy Christ's church, including the worst that man can bring against it.

Indeed, persecution will do just the opposite. In our weakness, we will discover His strength. In our weakness, we will discover a new love for Him and for one another. In our weakness, we will see God work in great and marvelous ways beyond our expectation. In our weakness, God always makes new hearers for the gospel. That is why persecution has never destroyed the church.

A more modern victim of persecution was John Wesley, the English preacher. Wherever he went, he preached the gospel, and he became a daily target of rocks, eggs and tomatoes. But John Wesley so understood the connection between effective evangelism and persecution that he expected nothing less than abuse. In fact, when two or three days passed without an egg or insult thrown at him, he even feared that he was in sin, failing to reflect the life of Christ to others!

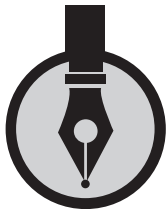
In spite of persecution, Wesley's faithful evangelism brought stunning revival to Christ's church in England and a massive harvest of souls, even among his persecutors, that changed English society for generations.

As India's Christians face persecution today, let us draw courage from those who have gone before us. We face hard times, but also the greatest opportunity that India has ever had to see the glory of Christ. Let us not seek persecution, but if it comes, let us bear it in His grace and victory.

As the old proverb says, "Whatever goes through the fire cannot be overcome by the heat of the sun." ●

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Vol. 18 | Issue 11 2023 November

A magazine that will enrich and renew your spiritual life and give Christian perspective on current events.

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KERALA - 689 547

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Cover & other photos courtesy: Google

POSTAL ADDRESS

P.O. BOX. 31, HEBRON, KUMBANAD

KERALA, INDIA, PIN - 689 547

Phone: 0469 - 2664075, 2665855

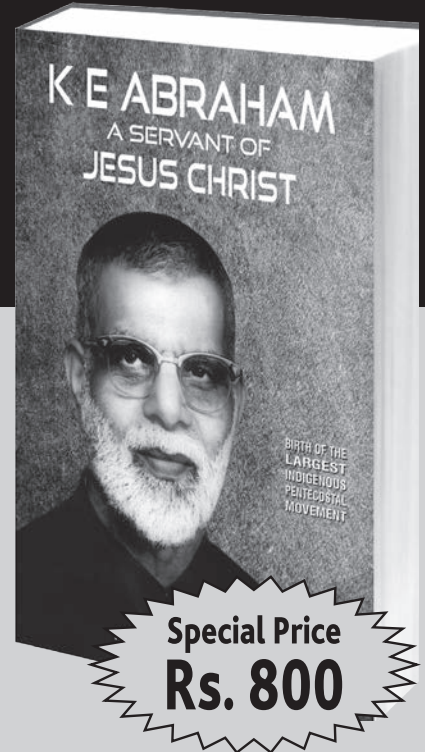
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Pastor Dr. John K. Mathew

PERSECUTED BUT NOT CAST DOWN

Jesus never said his work was safe. Whether it is risking our reputation, or risking our life, serving the gospel requires courage.

However, jeopardizing the liberties of others has become a norm in our society today. Some people in our community find pleasure in assaulting others. Obviously, it raises questions about the integrity of our government and the value Indians give to freedom, democracy and secularism. Also, it poses serious questions about our five thousand year old culture and civilization.

I am writing this in view of the brutal attack done on Christians in Attingal, Kerala. It attracted the attention of the public because of the bi-election in a nearby town. There are so many such incidents happening every day in different parts of the country. Unfortunately no one pays any attention. But one thing is true that Christianity has the power to face this and Christians are fully aware about it. Apostle Peter writes, "Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice in as much as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when His glory is revealed... How ever, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name" (1Pet.4:12-16) Here arises the question, what is a Christian?

An answer is easily found in a letter an anonymous writer wrote to a friend, which dates back to the first century. The writer describes a strange people who are in the world but not of the world: Christians are not differentiated from other people by country, language, or customs; you see, they do not live in cities of their own, or speak some strange dialect... They live in both Greek and foreign cities, wherever chance has put them. They follow local customs in clothing, food, and other aspects of life. But at the same time, they demonstrate to us the unusual form of their citizenship.

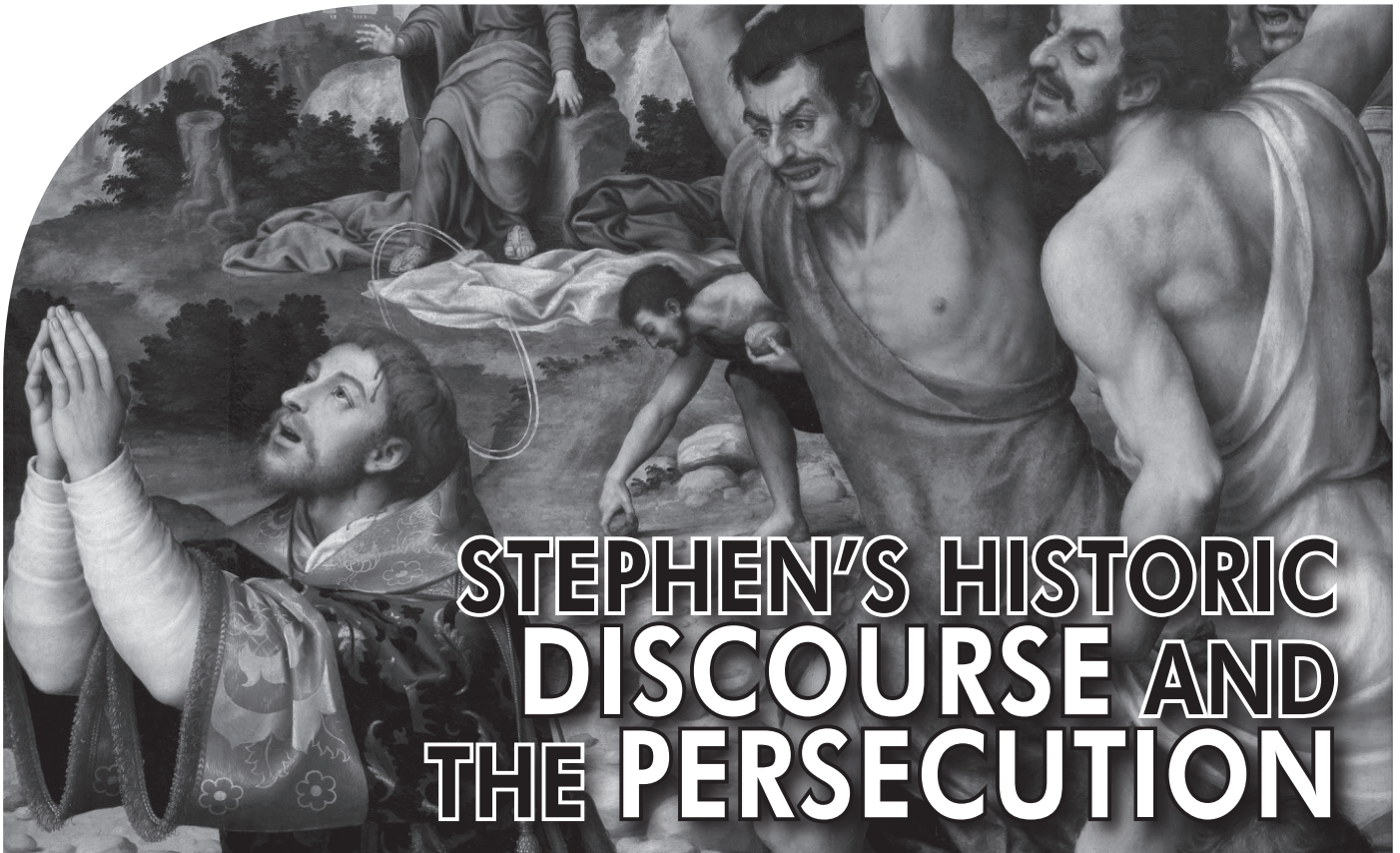
They live in their own native lands, but as aliens... every foreign country is to them as their native country, and every native land as a foreign country.

They marry and have children just like everyone else, but they do not kill unwanted children. They offer a shared table, but not a shared bed. They are passing their days on earth, but are citizens of heaven. They obey the appointed laws and go beyond the laws in their own lives.

They love everyone, but are persecuted by all. They are put to death and gain life. They are poor and yet make many rich. They are dishonored and yet gain glory through dishonor.

Their names are blackened, and yet they are cleared. They are mocked and bless in return. They are treated outrageously and behave respectfully to others.

When they do good, they are punished as evildoers. When punished, they rejoice as if being given new life. They are attacked by Jews as aliens and are persecuted by Greeks; yet those who persecute them cannot give any reason for their hostility. It is true everywhere and we need to rejoice in as much as we participate in the sufferings of Christ. ●



STEPHEN'S HISTORIC DISCOURSE AND THE PERSECUTION



REV. K. A. JOHN

Pastor and Bible Teacher
Canada

Stephen was not just servant who cared for widows. We not only meet a man who is chosen from among the church to serve the church, but we meet a man who was a powerful preacher. It says he was full of grace and power.

If you study the sermon in Acts chapter 7, it tells you everything he believed in basically. This is a full sermon by an early church believer, an early church preacher. This is a model of how they preached.

First of all, he believed that God ruled history. That's in Acts 7:1- 51.

The whole 7th chapter is his great sermon on how God rules history. Stephen believed, "God rules history. I am part of history. God rules me. God determines destiny. I am within the framework of destiny; God has determined my destiny.

He knew that the only person controlling his life was God. He absolutely believed it, so he did whatever God told him to do and didn't worry about it. He not only believed God was controlling history, but he believed Jesus was the Messiah. He believed Jesus was the fulfillment of all Messianic prophesy. As Luther said, they knew one thing for sure: that the Old Testament is the cradle in which the Christ Child is laid. Certainly, we learn from Stephen, that the gospel and the coming of Christ is rooted in God's dealings with Israel, recorded in the Old Testament. This is exactly the approach that Stephen in his sermon takes in Acts 7 because he is talking to Jews, to the most literate Jews, to the supreme court of Israel, the council of the Sanhedrin.

Stephen had been charged with four kinds of blasphemy. He had been charged with blasphemy against God, Moses, the law, and the temple - the most sacred things



in the mind of any Jew. It is important to notice that he answered these charges with Scripture. He defended the faith not in vagaries of philosophy, not in logic, but in verbal testimony to the Scripture. All throughout this sermon, this defense, Stephen quotes the Old Testament. He had an amazing knowledge of the Old Testament, Stephen defended himself against the idea that he blasphemed God. He stated his belief in God, God the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God, the God of Israel. He establishes that God has revealed himself in Scripture as the Jews believe and that He has called Israel into existence. This is capturing their attention at the point of what interests them and what is sacred to them.

He gives God His most exalted title, "The God of glory." Acts.7:2. The Jews were familiar with this title. In Ps. 29 we see an amazing declaration of the glory of God. Stephen says, I am talking to you affirming my belief in the God

Before they stoned him to death it says, "Being full of the Holy Spirit, he gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God." He saw the God of glory that he has just spoken about. He's saying, "I don't deny God. I don't blaspheme God."

of glory. I believe in the God of glory, He ascribes full supremacy, full sovereignty, full glory to the God. He actually died seeing something of that glory, verse 55. Before they stoned him to death it says, "Being full of the Holy Spirit, he gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God." He saw the God of glory that he has just spoken about. He's saying, "I don't deny God. I don't blaspheme God." He covers the history of Israel starting with the God of glory from Abraham to Joseph, from the call to the captivity, the first great era of Jewish history. In so doing he answered their charges that he was not a blasphemer of the true and living God.

He defended himself against that he blasphemed Moses. Stephen is saying everything positive he can say about Moses. He has no

blasphemer of Moses. Moses is a remarkable man. "This is the Moses who said to the sons of Israel, 'God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brethren.'" They all knew that was a messianic prophecy from Deuteronomy 18:15. This Moses, this Moses that you rejected was the very one who prophesied the coming of a prophet like unto himself, a prophet chosen by God, set apart by God. Moses was a deliverer from among his own people; so was Jesus. Moses came down from a palace to a role of a slave to rescue slaves; so did Jesus. Moses offered himself and was rejected; so did Jesus. Moses left Israel to go into a Gentile land and have a family; Jesus left Israel to raise up a seed among the Gentiles. Moses came back a second time to redeem his people and lead them to the promised land, and Jesus will come back a second time and lead His people to the promised land. Again, the history of Moses is like the foreshadowing of the history of Jesus. You couldn't honor Moses without honoring Christ.

He has great respect for this most noble deliverer of Israel. He has shown the Jews that they had a consistent, non-stop pattern of rejecting God's great deliverers. They were always priding themselves on their great love of their historic leaders, but their fathers had rejected both Joseph and Moses outright. They were historically blasphemers of God because they blasphemed God's intentions and purposes in His chosen leaders. He lays the weight of rejection on them.

The third charge against him was that he was a blasphemer of the law. It is God's law, it is alive and powerful. He is not a blasphemer of the law. But here comes the indictment of

them again, Acts. 7: 39. "Our fathers were unwilling to be obedient to him, but repudiated him and in their hearts turned back to Egypt, saying to Aaron, 'Make for us gods who will go before us; for this Moses who led us out of the land of Egypt – we do not know what happened to him."

It was there at the foot of Sinai that they began their idolatrous history. It all started there. The law commands that you shall have no other gods. But they said, make for us gods who will go before us. They made a calf, "brought a sacrifice to the idol, and were rejoicing in the works of their hands."

Who are the blasphemers? It was the people of Israel. Israel continually violated the first commandment, violated the rest of the Ten Commandments. Their history is a history of multiple thousands upon thousands of violations of every commandment the Lord gave. They worshipped idols, and it all led to Babylon.

I am not against the temple. The temple started with the tabernacle. It started with a tent, and it was the testimony of God. The tent was there all the way until the time of David. When David put his enemies down and brought peace, he looked at God's tent and said, "I have a house of cedar. God has a tent." "I'm going to build a fitting house for God" 2 Samuel 7:2.

But, by the time that Stephen was facing the council, they worshipped the building and not God. Stephen is saying: I recognized that God ordained a tent, and He ordained a temple, but God is bigger than your building, and you are blaspheming God by perverting the temple as if the temple itself is holy, and you have turned the temple.

He defended himself against the charges saying he believes fully in God, Moses, the law, the temple. They are all God-ordained, God-designed, for purposes of God. He does not reject Moses, the law, the temple, or God. But they, in their history, are following the exact pattern of the rejections of the past, their

whole history is a history of blasphemy and rebellion.

The false witnesses could have come to the council and said, Stephen is claiming that the hope of Moses has come, that prophet which Moses predicted is here, Messiah has come, that the old covenant has now led into the new covenant, that He who is the fulfillment of the law is here, that the dreams of all of us who have hoped for Messiah have come true." But they perverted it and said, "Stephen blasphemes."

They were saying, evil; blasphemer and he was sitting there with a holy face. His face was like the face of an angel. The glow of God was manifesting on his face. God had put on Stephen the face of the glory of God. Only one other man in the records of the bible ever had the glory of God on his face was Moses.

Here Stephen ranks with Moses. God was rebuking them by saying, "Only one other man ever looked like that man looks, and that is Moses. And I made Moses look like that, because I approved of his covenant, and I now make Stephen look like that, because I approve of the new covenant. God's saying that both of those were mine.

When they heard it, they were filled with anger, but Stephen was filled with the Holy Spirit. Marks of the spirit filled person, first of all he will always be looking at heaven, Secondly, his mind will be occupied with how God can be glorified. He is not concerned of his own reputation, his own name or his own life, he is concerned of only the glory of the lord. Thirdly such a person sees Jesus. His testimony is that I see Jesus and the heaven open for him, heaven will be open above us at the time of challenges.

When he was stoned at, He, being full of the Holy Spirit" "looked up." "What was he looking for?" it was for no one but Jesus. God pulled back the curtains, "and he saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God." Acts 7:55. The situation got tough, so he looked to the Lord. That's the only place to look. He always had good spiritual sight ever



since he met Christ. He just lost all the consciousness of what is going on around him, he was so absorbed in looking into heaven and he saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. In the Book of Hebrews, it says, "After Christ had accomplished redemption, He went to heaven, took the right of the Father, and He sat down." He sat down in terms of redemption, but He gets up when His children get in trouble. So, He gets up to help His own. Stephen, I'm coming to your rescue.

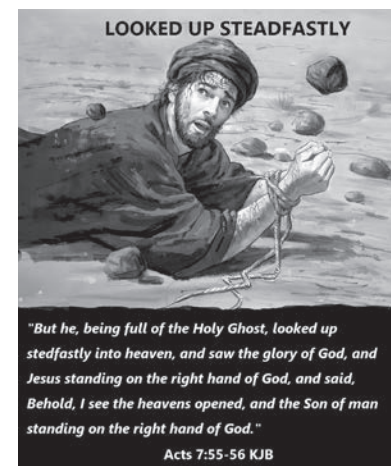
They absolutely lost themselves at that point. Because the words Stephen said were familiar words to that council. They had this other prisoner one time on trial, and the same group here, and the trial was in the same place, most likely. They had accused Him of blasphemy, too. And they brought in false witnesses, and the false witnesses didn't come across. And there was no enough evidence to kill this one. So, the high priest finally just said to this other prisoner, "You tell me plainly. Are You the Messiah?" He said,

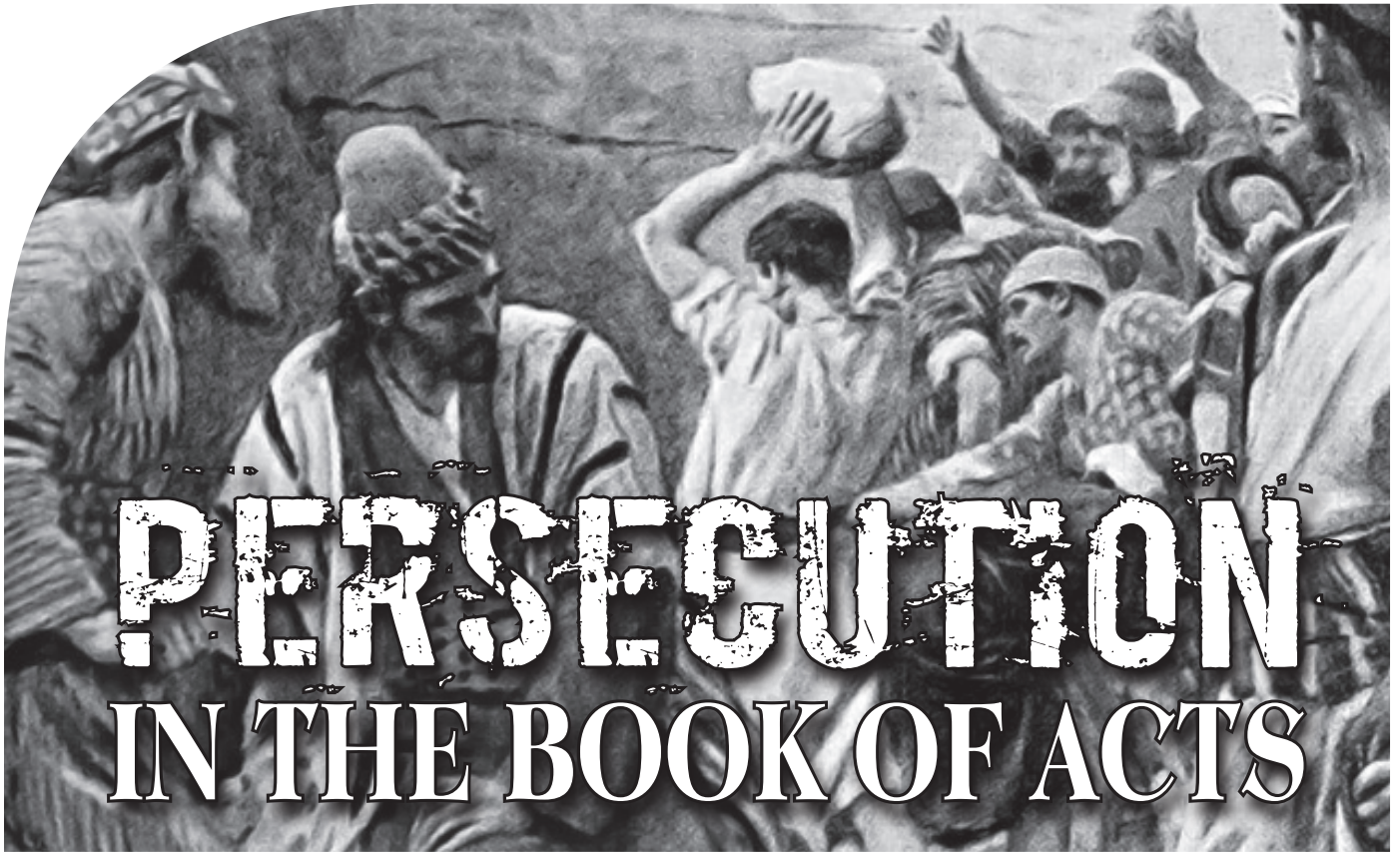
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He always had good spiritual sight ever since he met Christ. He just lost all the consciousness of what is going on around him, he was so absorbed in looking into heaven and he saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.
”

"I am." Mark 14:62 "And you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Almighty. He says, "I am the Messiah. You'll see Me seated at the right hand of God." And they killed Him for such blasphemy. Here Stephen says, "I see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of God." They killed Jesus for claiming it. Now Stephen verifies that it is true. They either had to kill Stephen or admit that they were wrong in killing Jesus, because Stephen is making the same claim for Jesus that Jesus made for Himself. It was blasphemy that Jesus even said He would be there, and Stephen says, "I see Him, and He is there."

Death satisfied them. They wanted death. But for Stephen it wasn't death. It was life. Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. He that believed in Me, though he were dead" yet shall he live. And whosoever lives and believe in me shall never die." There is no death. It's simply going from one thing to the next.

May it be that we live a life of such stark contrast from the world around us to be marked by the fullness of the Holy Spirit, to be marked by spiritual sight. Not just at the hour when we might have to sacrifice our lives, but all the time. ●





PERSECUTION IN THE BOOK OF ACTS



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Persecution is the act of singling out, victimizing, harassing, oppressing or killing an individual or group because of racial, religious, ethnic or political differences.

Christians are persecuted because of their belief in Jesus Christ.

The Bible records persecution of God's people in both the Old Testament and New Testament. The Pharisees persecuted Jesus because He did not follow their man made legalism. Following Christ's death, resurrection and ascension, organized persecution of the early Church took place. One of the most zealous opponents was Saul of Tarsus, later known as the Apostle Paul. After Paul converted to Christianity and became a missionary, the Roman Empire began to terrorize Christians.

Paul was beheaded by order of the Emperor Nero, and the Apostle Peter was reported to have been crucified upside down in a Roman arena. Killing Christians turned into a form of entertainment in Rome, as believers were executed and set on fire.

THE RECORDS OF PERSECUTION IN THE BOOK OF ACTS

Luke the physician who authored the book of Acts, describes the picture of the early Christian community in Jerusalem. They experienced the forgiveness, the power of Holy Spirit while sharing the gospel outside of their fellowship. The Christian Church which received the wind of the Spirit, now started to face a perilous storm that shook the church's very existence. The book of Acts deals with five different types of persecutions faced by the early Church. The following gives us a brief description of the same:



The persecution by the Sadducees: (Acts 4:1-32) they were the people who initiated the waves of persecution up on the church. They were the ruling class or the wealthy aristocrats who had political favour of the Romans. Theologically, they believed that the Messianic age had begun in the Maccabean period. They were not looking for a Messiah. They denied the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead which the apostles proclaimed in Jesus. Thus they considered the apostles as both agitators and heretics, disturbers of the peace and enemies of the truth. In consequence they were greatly disturbed (4:2). They treated the apostles as unprofessional unauthorized preachers.

The Chief of the temple police, who was responsible for maintenance of law and order, and the high priest put the apostle Peter and John in jail, because it was evening and could not convene the council. But the interesting thing is that, the Sadducees could not hinder the Word

The Chief of the temple police, who was responsible for maintenance of law and order, and the high priest put the apostle Peter and John in jail, because it was evening and could not convene the council. But the interesting thing is that, the Sadducees could not hinder the Word of God.

of God. Though the apostles were arrested, the gospel could not be confined. On the other side, many who heard the Word believed and the church began to grow (4:4).

The Sadducees persecuted the apostles because they were annoyed due to the healing of the cripple with Peter's sermon. Just as the Pentecost event had been the text for his first sermon, so the cripple's healing becomes the text for his second. Peter emphasized that Jesus was once rejected but now resurrected and reigning, and that Jesus made the crippled man strong. His sermon was a Christ centered one. Peter ended his sermon by exalting the name of Jesus. The devil cannot endure the exaltation of Jesus Christ, so he stirred up the Sanhedrin to persecute the apostles.

As a result, the apostles were brought before the council. They

questioned, 'By what power or what name they healed the crippled? (4:7). When the council was annoyed, Peter was freshly anointed with the Holy Spirit and answered that 'it is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth whom you crucified'. The court was astonished by the courage of Peter and John, who, though unschooled and ordinary men; realized that they had been with Jesus. They called the apostles and forbade them to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. To this prohibition the apostles replied that the court must judge 'whether it would be right in God's sight to obey them or God (4:19)'. The court threatened and allows them to go.

The Second Arrest and Trial: (Acts 5:17-42) The Sanhedrin heightens the persecution. The apostolic mission, particularly healing provoked the Sanhedrin. They felt that the apostles ignored the court's prohibition and threats and thus they were angered by the failure of the first assault on the apostles. The Sanhedrin had strictly ordered them to abstain from teaching in the name of Jesus. The high priest and all his associates, who were members of the Sadducees decided to take further action. They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail. (5:18) but during the night an angel brought them out and instructed them to proclaim the message of new life. On hearing the news, the captain and others were puzzled. In fact, the apostles disobeyed the Sanhedrin and obeyed God's command. The captain of the temple and his officers re-arrested the apostles, and brought them before the Sanhedrin a second time for questioning.

The apostles answer was a mini-sermon. They uplifted Christ rather than defend themselves. Through this they announced that Christians are called to submit to

human authorities, but if the authorities themselves misuse their God given power, the Christian's duty is to disobey the human authority in order to obey God's. The apostles stated that their primary responsibility is to obey God. Hearing the words of defense the council was furious, but Gamaliel, the Rabbi stood up and ordered the apostles to be put outside.

The apostles rejoiced in their tribulation because, it was an opportunity to demonstrate their loyalty to Christ and it was a real opportunity to share in the experience of Christ. It is true that "those who shared in the cross-bearing would share in the crown – wearing."

Luke the author of Acts brought the account of the two waves of persecution which broke over the infant church. In the first, the Council issued a prohibition and warning, which led the apostles to pray to the Sovereign Lord for boldness to go on preaching. In the second they received a prohibition and a beating, which led them to praise God for the honour of suffering for Christ.

Stephen the Martyr (Acts.6:8 – 7:60): After the coming of the Spirit and the counter attack of satan, the church is ready to initiate its worldwide mission. This was the time for the gentile mission. So far the church had been composed only of Jews and restricted to Jerusalem. Now, the Holy Spirit is about to thrust his people into the wider world. Stephen-the Martyr, Philip-the evangelist, Saul-the Pharisee, Cornelius - the centurion, these four men contributed to the global expansion of the church.

Stephen the martyr came first. His preaching aroused Jewish opposition. His preaching could not convince the council and thus he was stoned to death. He had vision of a world for Christ, for that he defended the truth as condemnation of his own nation. He uses the panoramic view of Jewish history.

Through his message Stephen announced them guilty of sinning against the Holy Spirit, the Messiah and the law. The Sanhedrin infuriated by his accusations,

gnashed their teeth at him. Snarling like wild animals. But Stephen was full of the Holy spirit looked up to heaven and had the vision of the glory of God, and he could see that the heaven opened and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God. The persecutors rushed at him, dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Stephen uttered 'Lord Jesus receive my spirit and lastly he uttered 'Lord do not hold this sin against them'. Stephen was the first Christian martyr.

Havoc of the Church: - Stephen's martyrdom brought a great persecution against the church at Jerusalem. The death of Stephen was the signal for an outbreak of persecution which compelled the Christians to scatter. All except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. Before the ascension of Jesus Christ, He commanded his disciples, "you will receive power: and you will be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and all in Judea and in Samaria, and to the uttermost part of the world" (Acts 1:8). Even after hearing this commandment, the disciples remained in Jerusalem; but now the commission was fulfilled as a result of persecution. The dispersion now resulted in wide spread evangelism. The dispersed Christians scattered the good seed of the gospel. They preached the Word where ever they went. The devil's attack (persecution) had the opposite effect to what he intended. Instead of smothering the gospel, persecution succeeded only in spreading it. " The wind increases the flame".

Saul who had approved of Stephen's stoning now began to destroy the church, a brutal and sadistic cruelty, making a house-to-house search for believers; he dragged off men and women and put them in prison. He did not spare the women, but he did not stop short of seeking and securing his victims' death (9:1, 22:42, 26:10) Saul made havoc of the church. His was a brutal cruelty. Acts of the apostles and the epistles describe how Saul a member of Sanhedrin and a Pharisee, persecuted the church. He killed the saints (8:1,9:1), Threatened (9:1) bringing them bound

unto Jerusalem (9:2), hath done many evils to saints (9:13), persecuted (22:4), do things contrary to the name of Jesus (26:9) shut up in prison and gave voice against them (26:10), a blasphemer and compelled others to blaspheme (26:11, 1 Timo.11:13), persecuted the church and wasted it (Gala.1:13).

Saul was converted to Christianity. This was not a sudden conversion but a sudden surrender. Saul might have asked himself that 'what secret these simple people had which made them face peril and suffering.....' The persecutions to the church and the martyrdom of Stephen drew Saul near to the risen Christ. Then onwards he became a man who ceased to do what he wanted to do and began to do what Christ wanted of him.

A new wave of persecution upon leaders: (Acts.12:1-10) It was instigated by King Herod. This was Herod Agrippa, the son of Aristobulus. Luke describes the death of James and imprisonment of Peter, both of them were apostles and leaders of the Jerusalem church. Herod Agrippa I killed James, but Peter was rescued by the intervention of God. The

early church realized the destructive power of Herod and the saving power of God. Throughout the history of the church, they grasped the expansion and opposing, growth and shrinkage, advance and retreat. But it is very clear that the powers of death and hell will never prevail against Christ's church since it is built on the Rock.

There is a possibility to think that Peter will not escape from this persecution as he was guarded by four quaternions of soldiers. Peter was chained both hands and soldiers were kept watching on him. In spite of impossibility of liberation, the hand of God definitely worked for peter and he escaped from all perils.

Book of Acts very clearly and vividly explains various persecutions faced by the early church, and how the risen Christ helped them in their difficulties. As a concluding word, may I state the attitude of the early Christians in the midst of all these troubles.

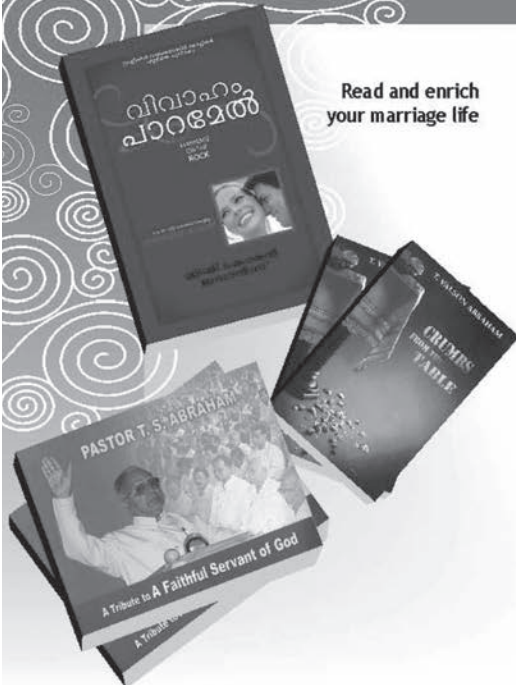
(i) They prayed: they lifted up their voice with one accord (4:24), the church prayed without ceasing (12:5) Paul

with Silas while he was in jail, prayed (16:25)

- (ii) They obeyed God rather than men (5:29)
- (iii) They were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name (5:41).
- (iv) The departed the council rejoicing (5:41)
- (v) Looked up steadfastly into heaven (7:55). They saw the glory of God and Jesus standing on the right hand of God.
- (vi) They sang praises into God (16:25)
- (vii) The Word of God preached and church began to grow. (8:4)

During this period, the church faces persecution from all areas. When we go through perils, persecutions, difficulties, let us follow the example of our Master and that of our forefathers. ●

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WHY CHURCH IS PERSECUTED TODAY?



DR. J.N. MANOKARAN

A Civil Engineer by profession. God called him and his family to be a missionary leader in Haryana as cross-cultural missionaries for eleven years. Since 1997 they returned back to Tamil Nadu to help missionaries and pastors to build their capacities by teaching, training and writing.

Persecution is a familiar word for Christians. Lord Jesus Christ told the disciples that the world hated him and the same world would hate his disciples also. (John 15:18-19) God so loved the world (John 3:16) and the world responded with so much hate that the Son of God was crucified. To expect accolades, rewards, and honour from the same world is to expect juicy sweet fruit from a neem tree. Peter also terms that persecution is part of Christian call: "For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps." (I Peter 2:21) Paul also reminds us of persecution as he writes to Timothy: "Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." (II Timothy 3:12) The New Testament Church as recorded in the Acts of Apostles by Luke provides us some insights regarding the kinds of persecution and how to handle them.

In India, there are so many reports of persecution from different parts of the country. Christians are being targeted and attacked. For media, it is no more news, but a routine status update.

In the Bible also we see patterns of persecution, that is applicable and relevant today.

POLITICAL

People in power are scared of dissent. They are not willing to lose power, and want to retain their dominance at any cost. So, any dissent, any rebellion and any potential threat should be eliminated. Egypt was a superpower in the ancient times. The Children of Israel were slaves in Egypt. However, Pharaoh and the ruling elite found their numbers as a threat. Hence, they devised ways and means to oppress



them. They appointed task masters and were drafted to do heavy toilsome work. (Exodus1:8-14). Nevertheless, the Israelites multiplied. Now, they devised another strategy. Pharaoh commanded the midwives to kill male children but spare the female children. (Exodus 1:15-22) Through out history, the dominating political class were afraid of the under-class or minorities. They devised methods to oppress them so that they do not grow up to full potential and also rebel against them.

Herod was threatened by the Wise Men who came to pay homage to the New Born Jesus. He felt that he was deceived by the Wise Men from the East and there was a conspiracy against him. Paranoid Herod killed innocent children, (Matthew 2:16) Insecure Herod thought he eliminated the future King by killing innocent children in Bethlehem.

Herod also was a shrewd ruler. (Mark 6:14-19). Herod wanted to please his second wife whom he had seduced.

Politics is for governance and welfare of the people. However, people in power want to retain the power even if it means to do injustice and oppress people. In India today, political leaders create scape goats in minorities, hatred towards them and channelize the anger towards persecuting the minorities.

His wife cunningly demanded the head of John the Baptist, as price for speaking against her. To please her and the guests who were gathered in the party, Herod ordered the beheading of the prophet. Apostle James also was beheaded by Herod. (Acts 12:2) The reason was that he should please people especially Jews, so that he could continue in power without opposition or dissent. Instead of doing what is right or just, Herod was doing what would retain him in power.

Politics is for governance and welfare of the people. However, people in power want to retain the power even if it means to do injustice and oppress people. In India today, political leaders create scape goats in minorities, hatred towards them and channelize the anger towards persecuting the minorities. Like Pharaoh, the insecure politicians



cry: "We are in danger."

Minority prosperous communities are easy targets of wily politicians. Jews were prosperous minority in Germany and other parts of the Europe. Hitler mesmerized the people stating that people are poor because the wealth is in the hands of Jews, so they should be annihilated. Kashmiri Pandits were prosperous in Srinagar (Jammu & Kashmir), they were targeted and persecuted. In Orissa the Christian tribals were far ahead of non-Christian tribals in terms of education, hygiene and even jobs. Christian tribals were persecuted.

Christians serve the community in various ways. Schools are one of the means of service. Education opens the minds of people to know truth. When education frees people from slavery to superstitions, deceptive godmen and black magicians; the control of politicians over people is lost.

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”

Hence, politicians target Christians as soft target to retain power over people.

ECONOMICAL

People love to have regular income. They are not worried, how the income comes. Demetrius, a silversmith in the city Ephesus saw a threat to his business of selling silver idols of Diana. (Acts 19: 23-27). He gathered other business people and instigated riots against Paul. In India, many people including tribals come to Lord Jesus Christ. After becoming disciples of Lord Jesus Christ, they stop drinking alcohol. The alcohol business persons instigate people against Christians and begin persecution.

Lord Jesus Christ drove the business people from Temple of Jerusalem. (Mathew 21:12-17) The chief beneficiaries of this illegal business were the High Priests. Hence, these Priests instigated the people against Lord Jesus Christ that resulted in the crucifixion of Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul delivered a girl who was demon possessed. When slave owners of this girl realized they lost their income through that girl, they instigated violence and court case against Paul and Silas. That resulted in the imprisonment of Paul and Silas. (Acts 16:16-24)

People who come to Christian fold are reformed. They stop evil practices like drinking, expensive rituals etc. They also start living clean and healthy. This breaks the poor Christians from the slavery of private bankers. Now, poor Christians do not have any need to borrow, for genuine needs, they get help from the community. This economic independence attracts persecution from vested interests.

SOCIAL

Lord Jesus spoke in Aramaic language, the common people could easily understand. So, he was popular with the masses. In India, the religious scripture are in sacred languages like Sanskrit, Arabic, Pali, or Gurumuki. Bible is in all common languages. Hence, the gospel becomes popular. Like the Priests who handed over Lord Jesus to Pilate to be executed, (Mark 15:10), religious leaders create social tension.

Gospel challenges the social oppression. For example, the Devdasi system, that allows a girl to be married to deity and made to serve as sex slave for all men who visit the temple. When the gospel is preached, the parents do not want to dedicate their girls as devdasi. This causes social tension and Christians are persecuted.

"The Channar Lahala or Channar revolt refers to incidents surrounding the rebellion by Nadar climber women asserting their right to wear upper-body clothes against the caste restrictions sanctioned by the Travancore kingdom, a part of present day Kerala, India. In Travancore, Cochin and Malabar, no female was allowed to cover their upper part of the body in front of Upper castes of Kerala until the 19th century. Under

the support of Ayya Vaikundar, some communities fought for their right to wear upper clothes and the upper class resorted to attacking them in 1818. In 1819, the Rani of Travancore announced that the lower castes including the Nadar climber women have no right to wear upper clothes like most lower non-Brahmin castes of Kerala. However, the aristocratic Nadan women of the region were exempted from this restriction. Violence against Nadar climber women who revolted against this continued and reached its peak in 1858 across the kingdom, notably in southern taluks of Neyyattinkara and Neyyur. On 26 July 1859, under pressure from the Madras Governor, the king of Travancore issued a proclamation announcing the right of Nadar climber women to wear upper clothes but on condition that they should not imitate the style of clothing worn by upper class women. Though the proclamation did not quell the tension immediately, it gradually subsided as the social and economical status of Nadar climbers progressed in subsequent decades with significant support from missionaries and Ayya Vaikundar."

CULTURAL

Lord Jesus healed on the Sabbath day. (Mark 3:1-6) According to Jewish religion and culture, no work should be done on the Sabbath Day. The healing was considered as work and Jews wanted to kill Jesus for not following the tradition.

The Circumcision party wanted the Gentile converts to Christian faith to circumcise. (Acts 15) These people considered the culture supreme to the Scripture. In the name of culture, people are kept under bondage. Child marriage is a cultural practice in many parts of India. Children are married off, even when they do not understand marriage or family life. The people who follow Lord Jesus Christ refuse to give their children for marriage until they attain the legal marriageable age. This is seen as cultural violation and so Christians are persecuted.

RELIGIOUS

Paul and Barnabas went as missionaries to Derbe, Lystra (first missionary journey). In Lystra, God used them and people perceived that they were gods in human form. (Acts 14:12) In both these cities, unbelieving Jews poisoned the minds of the people and instigated the crowd against the apostles. (Acts 14:2, 9) The Jewish leaders persecuted the early Church. Religious leaders oppose gospel work as they are insecure of losing their members. When religious leaders lose their power over people, they are scared and instigate persecution against politicians.

CHALLENGE

The world is an imperfect place. The people are sinners who live in spiritual darkness. The Church is the light in the world. The people instead of loving light, hate light. The result is persecution of Christian community. Christians should remember that our fight is not against flesh and blood, meaning people but spiritual forces that instigate them. (Ephesians 6:12) Satan and his demonic angels always work against God and people of God. However, the ultimate victory belongs to God and His people. The suffering is temporary and it is not comparable with the eternal glory we are promised. (Romans 8:18). ●

**THE PAIN THAT
YOU'VE BEEN FEELING,
CAN'T COMPARE TO
THE JOY THAT'S
COMING.**

Romans 8:18





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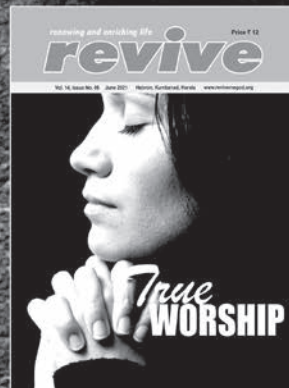
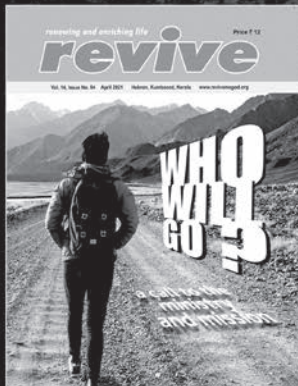
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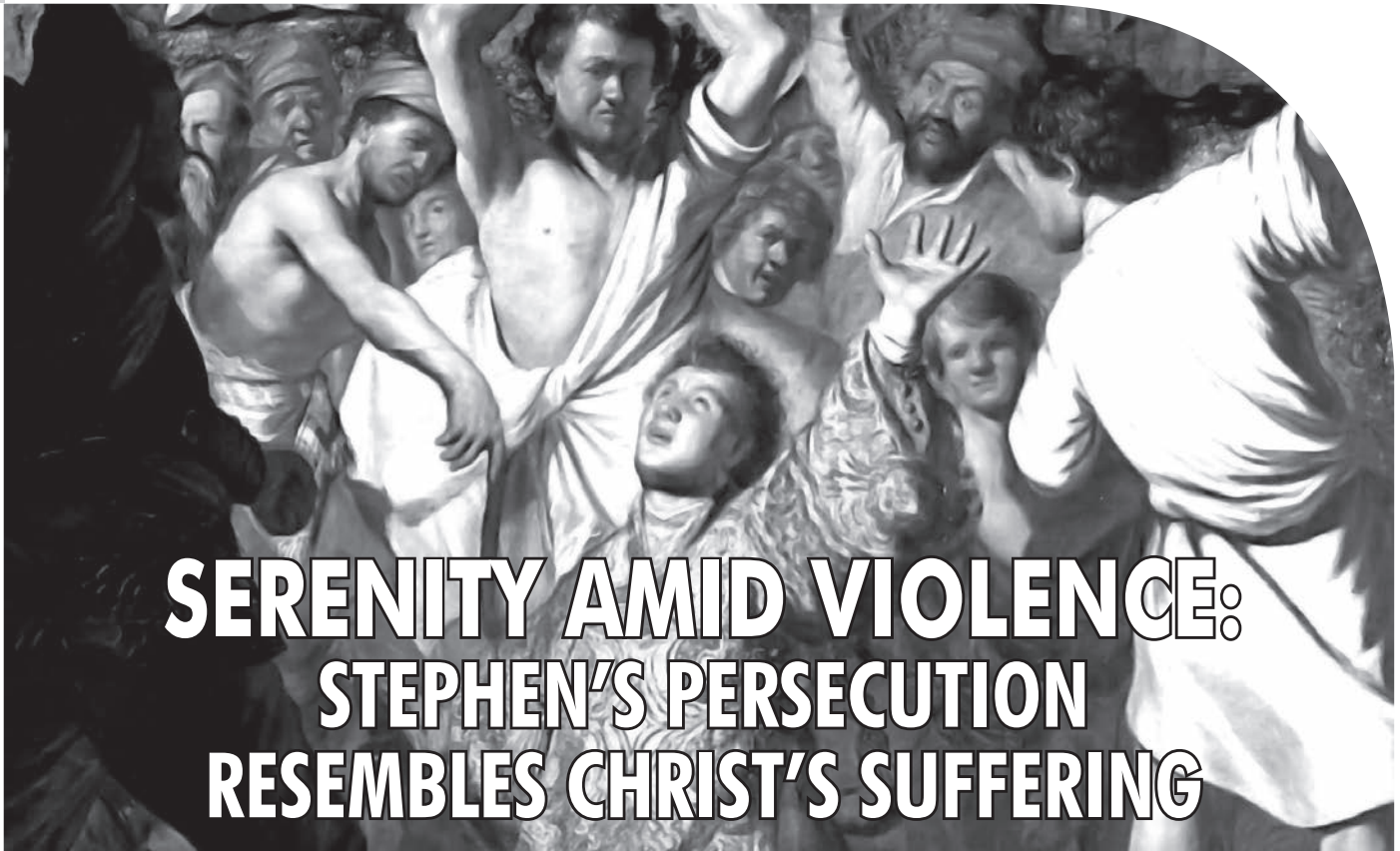
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SERENITY AMID VIOLENCE: STEPHEN'S PERSECUTION RESEMBLES CHRIST'S SUFFERING



RATHEESH A.P.

Faculty
India Bible College
and Seminary

Violence has been an ongoing issue since Christianity began over two thousand years ago. Religious news reports that Christianity is the most persecuted religious group in the world, with members facing imprisonment, loss of home and property, torture, rape, and even death as a result of their faith. So, violence is an excessive use of force that causes destruction and harm, especially unjust injury. Even in the midst of persecution, Christians taught tolerance to their Nations. John Knox, a student at Westminster, says, "Jesus used the cross to save the people, not sword and force." Those who are using swords and force are not followers of Jesus. Both Stephen's and Jesus' attitudes towards persecution have influenced people to expound tolerance in the midst of violence.

Suppression of Truth

Stephen's sermon in Acts chapter 7 addresses the Sanhedrin, which was the highest Jewish council in the 1st century. He walks through the history of Israel and criticises them for their misunderstanding about their own spiritual roots (vs. 1-8); they rejected their God-sent deliverers (vs. 9-36); they disobeyed their laws (vs. 37-43); they despised their Temple (vs. 44-50); and they stubbornly resisted their God and His truth (vs. 51-53). When they heard these hard words from Stephen, they were all outraged. In fact, they were all not offended by him; rather, they were furious at the truth that he spoke against them. So, they were not actually trying to destroy Stephen, but they were prompted to suppress the truth. Even if the truth is suppressed, it just needs a small crack

to crop out; it comes out to the surface, pushing down the volume and weight of water. Centuries have passed and been forgotten, but the truth about Christ prevails.

The hostile response of Jewish leaders towards Jesus' teachings was depicted on different occasions in the Gospels. They were intolerant of hearing the truth about them and their traditions through His teachings. It was hard for them to accept the truth, so they looked for an opportunity to kill him. As a matter of fact, they were disturbed to hear about the truth, not about him. They tried to destroy the truth, but on the other hand, the truth always wins despite any human efforts to cover it up.

Persecution unveils the glory of God

During the storm lashing in the hall of the Sanhedrin, Stephen seems to be on an island of serenity. Luke mentions that Stephen was full of spirit, which caused him to look upward to heaven. In the same manner, Luke employs the same phrase to look intently into heaven as he used to describe the apostles looking towards the sky at the time Jesus ascended (1:10).

At this moment, Stephen sees God's glory in real life, not in a vision. He glowed like an angel at the onset of his trial (6:15), but at the culmination, he sees God's glory. Although Scripture denotes that no one is able to see God and live, God's glory has often been revealed to man. Stephen was literally facing a physical attack on his body; each

stone was severely piercing his body, but he was intensively captured by God's glory. He sees Jesus standing at the right hand of God, which conceivably indicates that Jesus is welcoming Stephen to heaven. The expression "at the right hand of God" refers to the highest honour given to Jesus at the time of his ascension. Amid painful physical experiences, he could see the glory of God. Wherever God's anointed is persecuted, God's glory is revealed on the same occasion.

The trial of Stephen bears a resemblance to that of Jesus. When Jesus stood trial before the Sanhedrin, the high priest asked him whether he was the Son of God. He gave an affirmative answer that his audience would see "the Son of man sitting at the right hand of power and coming on the clouds of heaven" (Matt. 26:64; Heb. 1:3, 13). Jesus reveals his role and his position in relationship with his Father. For the Sanhedrin, it was an offensive statement, but Jesus was revealing himself during the time of trial.

Prayer for mercy, not justice

By way of Stephen facing great opposition, his audience started stoning at him. And the pain was unbearable. In the midst of his pain, he prayed for his opponents. His prayer was not for the forgiveness of his sin but for that of his opponents. It is also possible that Martyrs sometimes prayed for vindication of their persecutors, but to our amazement, Stephen's prayer was more for mercy than justice. It is also noted that Saul was the one who supported the persecutors by keeping their clothes. But later, Saul became Stephen's successor in carrying the gospel to Greek-speaking Jews and Gentiles. In his missionary life, Paul suffered ten times as much for Christ as Stephen did (II Cor. 11:23-29). On the death of Stephen with Paul's consent,

Augustine made this penetrating comment: If Stephen had not prayed, the church would not have had Paul. His prayer for mercy on his opponents resulted in Paul's conversion.

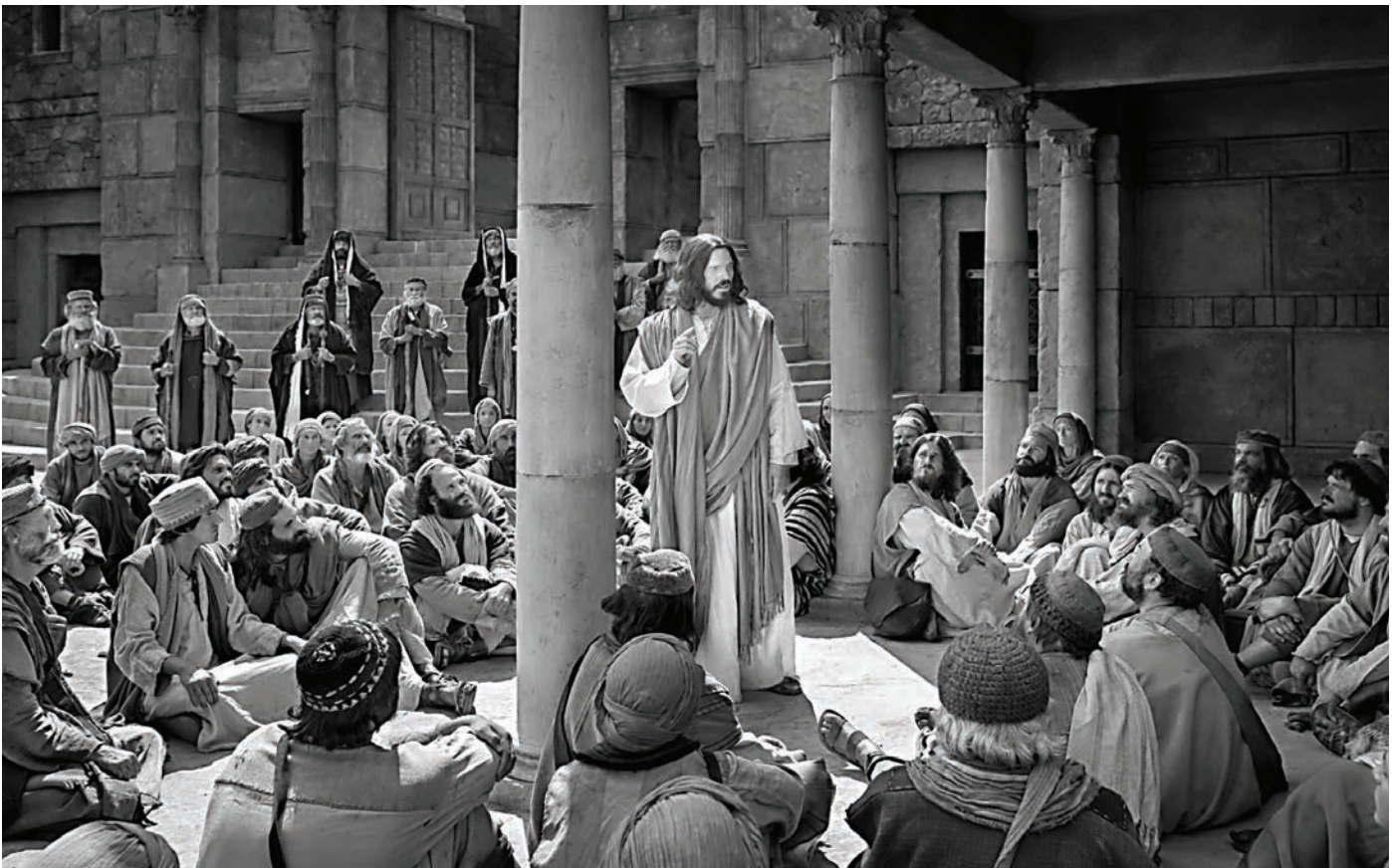
Stephen's prayer virtually reflects the words of our Lord Jesus' prayer when he was crucified: Lord, do not hold this sin against them" (Luke 23:34). Here, the sequence of Stephen's prayer is noteworthy. Firstly, he prays that Jesus will accept his spirit, and then he prays that his enemies' sin of killing an innocent man may be forgiven. The title 'Lord' in (Acts 7: 59) refers not to God but to Jesus. In his prayer, Stephen places Jesus on the level of God and thus prays to him directly. One last remark about these prayers is that even if the wordings of Jesus and Stephen's prayers differ, the sentiments they express are the same. Stephen's prayer, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit" (Acts 7:59) is similar to Jesus' prayer on the cross, Father, into your hands I commend my spirit" (Luke 23:46). And in the same way Stephen's final words, "Lord, do not count this sin against them."

(Acts 7:60) resonates with Jesus' prayer, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." (Luke 23:34).

However, Stephen's attitude towards his opponents when he was persecuted also resembles Jesus' teachings to His disciples in the gospel of Matthew when they encounter opposition from the Jewish leaders.

Mathew's portrayal of Jesus' attitude towards persecution

Gospel of Mathew is much interested in presenting Jesus as the person who treats his enemies beyond the rationale or incompatibility of the existed environment. There are several passages reflect that how Jesus has responded towards the conflicting



situations with the Jewish leaders. The concept of nonviolence is explicitly mentioned in Matt 5:43-48. Matthew's use of "Love for one's enemy" reflects the Polemical tendency towards his enemies (Matt 5:43-48). Matthew's use of this term reflects the social situation of the Christian Community. When the Fellow Jewish group accepted Christianity they were excommunicated from the synagogue and were not given privilege to participate in any societal involvements. They were completely neglected, looked down and marginalized from the community.

In such a situation Jesus teaches that how one should respond towards the opposition or persecution. By teaching nonviolence Jesus shows that his community is pure, righteous and perfect where his opponents are stand in opposition. A brief explanation from Matt 5:43-48 will helps us to

By teaching nonviolence Jesus shows that his community is pure, righteous and perfect where his opponents are stand in opposition. A brief explanation from Matt 5:43-48 will helps us to understand Jesus attitude towards the people who are facing the attack for the sake of their faith.

understand Jesus attitude towards the people who are facing the attack for the sake of their faith.

For Matthew the opponents are the one who hate Jewish Christians (Matt 5:43). In the beginning of this section Matthew has two elements of which the first one is a direct citation from the law and the other is not, although he presents this latter as if it is part of the Old Testament, it is through this misinterpretation of Torah that Matthew portrays the opponents as those who hate the Christians any longer neighbours but as enemies. This strong polemic presentation reflects the situations of his own community and urges them to

love their enemies as the part of obeying Jesus' commandment.

Here Matthew presents the opponents of the Jewish Christians are the one who persecute them (v.44b). This verse expresses that Jewish Christians suffers persecution from Jewish establishments. But it is precisely in a situation of persecution that Jesus' followers are to show their love by praying for those who are harming them. The religious leaders are labelled or described as persecutors in Matt 23:34.

Thus, it is through this double command (v.44) that Matthew tries to show that the Jewish opponents are the persecutors of the Christians. The Christians are portrayed as the victims of persecution. Matthew defends his own community that practices the command of love of one's enemies to show their higher value of ethics which is lacking in their opponents. To conclude, Matthew's focus on the theme of persecution in this verse is also an indication that the Matthean Community is at least in the process of separation.

Matthean Community presents as the Children of the Heavenly Father (v. 45). The Christians who love their enemies are identified as Sons of God. The Matthean Community is distinguished from the opponents as they love their enemies and also by their participation in the activity of the Father who actively does good thing to all. Matthew retains a sharp distinctive language from the source: good and wicked; righteous and unrighteous in the description of God's character.

Stephen's attitude towards his opponents was to grant them God's mercy so that their sins would be forgiven. Here he gives us a new message: Christians are not to pray for justice when they are persecuted but rather ask for the forgiveness of their opponents' sins.

It is by this polemic language (v.45), Matthew tries to distinguish his own group is righteous who love their enemies than his opponents who persecute Christians.

Matthew seems to portray the picture of Christians who are asked to go beyond reciprocal love to obtain reward (vv 46-47). So Matthew has Jesus promoting a new ethics that surpasses that of the opponents. This elevated status of the community through the commandment of enemy love (and so the higher ethic) is a differentiation of Matthean Community's distinction from the Jewish neighbours.

Matthew also presents the opponents' inadequacy of achieving perfection (v.48). Matthew concludes his antithesis with a call to perfection. Matthew's intension possibly is to show that his own community observes a

higher ethics (perfection). The term perfection stands in v.48, is used first as an attribute of human beings (v.48) and then as divine attribute (v.48). In the immediate context it means loving one's enemy, imitation of God who is impartial to both good and bad people (v.45).

They argue that for Matthew to be "perfect" means fulfil the law through the Manifestation of unrestrained love. In contrast to the Jewish understanding of perfection, which is obeying the Law, Matthew shows that Christian perfection consists of obeying Jesus which is love their enemies. The implication is that the opponents claim to reach perfection but are incapable of achieving it. In doing so, he criticizes the opponents for lacking this qualification. Christians are perfect as they hold to a new ethics of higher righteousness and fulfil the Torah as Jesus interprets it for them. This understanding of the law distinguishes Matthew's group from its scribal and pharisaic opponents. It is a strong way of presenting Matthew's message to the opponents. So the Jewish Christians are the perfect ones who love their enemies even in the midst of persecution.

In the Gospels, Jesus proclaims entirely a new way of life, i.e., the way of non-violence. Through His words and teachings, Jesus calls the Church to have a reciprocal love towards their enemies. Stephen's attitude towards his opponents was to grant them God's mercy so that their sins would be forgiven. Here he gives us a new message: Christians are not to pray for justice when they are persecuted but rather ask for the forgiveness of their opponents' sins. ●



LOREN CUNNINGHAM FOUNDER OF YWAM FINISHED HIS RACE

Loren Cunningham, the charismatic visionary who launched Youth With a Mission (YWAM) and mobilized millions of young people for short-term trips, finished his race at the age of 88. When he was only 20, Cunningham was praying and saw an image of a map, but the map was moving. Waves were crashing on the shores of every continent, receding, and then crashing again. The picture appeared to him like “a mental movie,” he would later say, and as he looked closer, the waves were young people, “kids of my age and even younger,” fulfilling the Great Commission to “go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation” (Mark 16:15).

The vision became the core idea for YWAM. The organization has called it “a God-initiated, destiny-defining, foundational covenant from God to birth a new missions movement.”

According to Cunningham, it took him a few years to understand what he’d seen. But it ultimately empowered him to “deregulate” missions, sending more people, more quickly, to more places where they could proclaim the truth of God and display His love.”

YWAM (pronounced WHY-wham) currently operates in more than 2,000 locations in nearly 200 nations. The organization stopped counting how many young people it sent on short-term missions in 2010, when the total number was around 4.5 million.

“What I like about the spirit of YWAM is being willing to charge hell with a squirt gun,” Steve Douglass told CT a few years before he died, when he was president of Campus Crusade for Christ International (now Cru).

“What an incredible life this man lived,” the president of Samaritan’s Purse wrote on social media. “Loren allowed God to use him, and he was a force for the Gospel for decades.”

Cunningham was born on June 30, 1935, in Taft, California, but in his first memories, he was in a tent somewhere in Arizona. He, his parents, and his older sister were making adobe bricks by hand to build a small Pentecostal church.

The couple taught their three children to sacrifice personal comfort for the sake of the gospel and to listen to God personally. In his later years, Loren Cunningham remembered learning that the leading of the Spirit could be a matter of life or death. Once, his father was preaching on the street in a Southern California town when his mother suddenly said, “We have to go now. God said we have to go now!” As the family drove away, an earthquake shook the town and a pile of bricks fell on the sidewalk where they had been standing. When he was 13, he received a call to ministry while praying in a brush arbor in Arkansas with several

cousins. To celebrate, his mother took him to town and bought him new shoes, quoting Romans 10:15: "How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel" (KJV). "God speaks in your language," he would jokingly tell televangelist Pat Robertson in 2022, "and I was a surfer as a teenager in California and I saw these waves."

The failure of Bible schools

As Cunningham worked on a thesis about Bible schools, however, he became disillusioned. He looked at 72 institutions around the world and found that few, if any, were having a significant impact on world evangelization. The majority of graduates were not even going into ministry—much less becoming the kind of missionaries who could carry the gospel to the ends of the earth. The Assemblies of God said if they wanted to be missionaries, they needed to go to school and get about seven years of education and training.

"By which time," Cunningham complained, "most would have forgotten their fiery zeal."

He went to Japan, Hong Kong, Thailand, Cambodia, India, Pakistan, Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, Turkey, Greece, Scandinavia, and Great Britain. He started making big plans for 1961.

Cunningham decided to leave the Assemblies of God and go out on his own. YWAM was officially incorporated in the state of California in February 1961.

Darlene Cunningham implements the vision

When Cunningham met a young woman named Darlene Scratch in 1962, the struggling missionary organization was sending out about five annually. But Scratch,

who had herself dreamed of cross-cultural ministry after her uncle was imprisoned for missionary work in Communist China, saw some ways to implement the YWAM vision practically. Cunningham married her the following year and declared her, ever after, the co-founder.

"There never would have been anything lasting without Darlene," he said.

All of the missionaries were young, raised their own funds, and didn't let training requirements dampen their zeal.

There were, of course, numerous challenges and many basic mistakes in those early years. More than one vehicle got stuck in the mud on an impassable road. One early flyer misspelled Christ, inviting young people to spend their summer representing "Chist" "Chist." The YWAMers learned to trust God, pray, and figure it out.

And reports of the challenges actually drew more young people.

"You're going to sleep on the floors, eat food that's different, suffer hot and sticky climates, and be surrounded by mosquitoes," Cunningham told them. "You're going to come up emotionally drained and spiritually attacked. But it's part of growing us up in the Lord."

A laboratory for evangelism

By 1968, YWAM had 30 full-time staff and 1,200 short-term missionaries. The organization decided a little training would be helpful and launched a school in a hotel in Switzerland. The first teachers included Cunningham's parents, evangelical apologist Francis Schaeffer, mechanical engineer and lay theologian Harry Conn, and the Scottish evangelist Duncan Campbell.

"It is not a Bible school," Cunningham explained, "but a laboratory for evangelism."

YWAM launched more schools, ultimately operating University of the Nations in more than 600 locations. One leader said they were the "wave machine" producing the waves of young people that Cunningham had seen in his vision.

The schools offer evangelism training but also degrees in sports and fitness, science and technology, education, communication, and art.

Cunningham said he had a revelation about seven classrooms, each corresponding to the seven spheres of society that Christians needed to impact to bring about change.

He went to tell his friend, Cru founder Bill Bright, about this revelation in 1975. But before he could say anything, Bright announced he'd had a revelation and produced a basically identical list of seven spheres. A few weeks later, Cunningham heard Schaeffer make a very similar argument about taking dominion for Christ over these seven different areas: family, religion, education, media, art, economics, and government.

The idea was later popularized by Bethel pastor Bill Johnson and others as the "Seven Mountain Mandate." It became the theological basis for many American charismatics to embrace Donald Trump.

Cunningham, however, did not get involved in politics. He saw the seven spheres as a framework for evangelism and "Great Commission strategies."

By the time Cunningham turned 50 in 1985, YWAM was sending out more than 15,000 young people on short-term trips every year. The ministry operated in 1,100 locations in 170 nations. And yet the visionary leader was convinced, as he wrote in his first book, that those young people were "only a fraction of a fraction of what was needed" and that "the laborers were still few, very few."

He continued to focus on growing, expanding, and innovating. In 1999, Cunningham traveled to Libya and became the first missionary to go to every nation in the world, as well as 150 islands and territories. "It's been a great life," he said, "I'd say to anyone ... have a purpose. Have a call. Make sure that you are doing it for God and His purposes. He is love, and you must show His love." ●

STEPPED INTO GLORY



PASTOR K.M. JOSEPH (89)

"IPC lost a leader in Pastor K.M. Joseph. He was a humble and diligent servant of God who was a role model and a mentor to many pastors. I have many fond memories of stimulating and inspiring conversations with him. He was very close to us as a family and especially to my father, the late Pastor T.S. Abraham. Together, they led the church at a critical time and ministered with grace and authority. Praying for God's comfort to envelop Ammama (Mrs. K.M. Joseph), all the children and grandchildren.

His passion for souls, discipline of the church and spirit of intercession were evidenced in his conversations and jokes!

He held captive every audience when he skilfully narrated details about his life in the Merchant Navy; ministry experiences or his prayer journey round the world.

Pastor K M Joseph was born in 1934 as the son of Abraham Mathew at Ancheril in Kottayam. In 1954, he joined the Merchant Navy. He was saved and

baptized in 1954 in New Zealand while sailing. In 1967, he quit his job. He studied God's Word in New Zealand. On his return, Pastor K M Joseph became a minister in the IPC's Vadavathur, Vakathanam, and Kumaranelloor churches. He then moved to North Travancore with Perumbavoor as its headquarters. He established Agape Bible College, a Children's home, and served as the IPC State VP, General VP, General Secretary, and State President.

Achayan lived with hope in eternity with Christ!

We walk in that hope and we look forward to seeing him soon!!

He which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus . . . 2 Corinthians 4:14

The resurrection of Christ brings hope.

May the Blessed assurance and Hope we have in Christ grip the hearts of all grieving at this time"

Pastor T. Valson Abraham

General President of IPC



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