

## BLESSED ARE THE PERSECUTED FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS SAKE



**(Matthew 5:10; II Thess. 1; I Peter 4:13-14; John 15:19-21)**

Stephen was a man full of faith and full of and controlled by the Holy Spirit (Acts 7:5). Noted for his outstanding faith, he suffered persecution and ultimately death through stoning. No harassment could touch his faith to diminish it. Instead, it grew deeper and deeper to the point of death, and death by stoning. Just before it happened, he saw the glory of God and YAHSHUA standing at His right hand (Acts 7:55). With uncontrolled anger, for not being able to convince him to give up the faith in YAHSHUA, the people dragged him out of the city and stoned him. Not even that, however, erased his steadfastness to the faith, neither his courage to face death. Instead, Stephen prayed, Lord YAHSHUA, receive my spirit, and falling on his knees, he cried out loudly, Lord, fix not this sin upon them! And when he had said this, he fell asleep [in death] (Acts 7:58-60). Stephen was ready to be transferred from this earth into his glorious home. Death to him was an

entrance to heaven. Fear did not take hold of him, as he held onto the words of YAHSHUA, I warn you whom you should fear: fear Him Who, after killing, has power to hurl into hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him! (Luke 12:5). No one, not even the devil, could stop his spirit from meeting God. This is a beautiful example of a courageous, devoted and faithful life. He died forgiving his enemies. In his own words, when falling on his knees, he cried out loudly, Lord, fix not this sin upon them! And when he had said this, he fell asleep [in death] (Acts 7:60).

YAHSHUA said, Blessed are the persecuted for righteousness sake for theirs is the kingdom of heaven; blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and say all kinds of evil things against you falsely on My account, be glad and supremely joyful, for your reward in heaven is great, for in this same way people persecuted the prophets who were before you (Matt. 5: 10-12). There is much to rejoice when we are persecuted for our faith, even if it takes our breath away. First, our Lord YAHSHUA was persecuted and marked with men's hatred; [He became an object of horror]. His face and His whole appearance were marred more than any man's, and His form beyond that of the sons of men... (Isaiah 52:14). Just think of Him Who endured from sinners such grievous opposition and bitter hostility against Himself, so that you may not grow weary or exhausted, losing heart and relaxing and fainting in your minds (Heb. 12: 3). So, we realize that no sufferings we endure for His sake will ultra-pass the extent of the sufferings He endured for us. We will never be able to fathom His agony when He suffered hell for us. No, no one, even in the worst persecution, has endured what our Savior went through for us.

Before His own trials, and tribulation, YAHSHUA uttered words of comfort and hope to His disciples, in spite of their season of persecution: *He said, If you belonged to the world, the world would treat you with affection and would love you as its own. But because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of this world, the world hated you. Remember that I told you, A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted Me, they will also persecuted you...*

*(John 15:19-20)*. Persecution is one of the marks of a true believer in YAHSHUA; it is a mark that we are not of this world; this world is just the wilderness we must pass in route to our heavenly home. That's another reason why we should rejoice in persecution. YAHSHUA said, Let the dead bury their dead, you follow Me. In other words, let those of the world mind the affairs of the world. Our focus is to follow Him in good times, in trial times, in persecution times until death takes us

to our permanent heavenly home. YAHSHUA encouraged us to be glad and supremely joyful (in our sufferings), for our reward in heaven is great. The greater the persecution and our endurance, the greater the reward will be.

Like the heroes and heroines of the faith, we should be yearning for a better and more desirable country, that is, a heavenly [one] (Heb. 11:16a). To die in the hands of our persecutors without bitterness, is to follow the steps of our Lord YAHSHUA. Vengeance belongs to the Lord and He will act when the time is right. Paul comforted the Thessalonians in the midst of their sufferings due to persecutions: [it is fair decision] since it is a righteous thing with God to repay with distress and affliction those who distress and afflict you; and to [recompense] you who are so distressed and afflicted [by granting you] relief and rest along with us when the Lord YAHSHUA is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in a flame of fire to deal out retribution upon those who do not know or perceive or become acquainted with God and who ignore and refuse to obey the Gospel of our Lord YAHSHUA the Messiah. Such people will pay the penalty and suffer the punishment of everlasting ruin and eternal exclusion and banishment from the glory of His power (II Thess. 1:6-9).

This is high time for persecution of the saints in Messiah. No other religion has gone through so much persecution than that of Christianity, because we bear the name of YAHSHUA. The religious people of the world walk and live in the darkness of their faith. Some is filled with so much hatred for Christianity to the point of killing by death of crucifixion, by burning them alive and by beheading them. The root of their religion is based on hate and vengeance; there is no room for any other religion to co-exist with them. I pity their doom. Heaven is certainly a place of peace and love. There is no room there for those with so much hatred. One must be washed clean from all these with the blood of the Lamb –YAHSHUA and forgiveness will assure them of a place in heaven. Persecution is a sure thing a believer in YAHSHUA must endure sometime in his life, and we must remember the warning of Paul to Timothy: *If we endure, we shall also reign with Him. If we deny and disown Him, He will also deny and disown and reject us (II Tim. 2:12).*

Paul contemplated his death as a sacrifice, a poured out drink offering soon to happen in the hands of the Romans, whose goal was to rid of all who believed in YAHSHUA. That was a time of persecution the Christians endured and many became martyrs of the faith. Writing to Timothy his last letter to him, he was

saying good-bye in a sense, when he said, *For I am already about to be sacrificed; the time of my release is at hand and I will soon go free. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me and recompense me on that day- and not to me only, but also to all those who have loved and yearned for and welcomed His appearing (II Tim. 4:6-8).*

My friend, do you know whom you have believed? Are you ready to suffer for His sake? There will be a time when you and I must stand for whom we believe. There will be no more choice available but to deny our faith. That will be the time when the true church of God will stand clean from all the pretenders through persecution. Peter wrote, Beloved, do not be amazed and bewildered at the fiery ordeal which is taking place to test you quality, as though something strange were befalling you, but insofar as you are sharing Christ's sufferings, rejoice, so that when His glory is revealed, you may also rejoice with triumph. If you are censured and suffer abuse [because you bear] the name of Christ, blessed are you because the Spirit of glory, the Spirit of God, is resting upon you (I Peter 4: 12-14).

*Will you be able to say, I have fought the good fight, finished the race, and kept the faith, at the end of your life?*

**THINK ABOUT IT!**