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5-31-2021

THE FALLEN HEROES – LESSON 2

THE FIRST CHRISTIAN MARTYR

Today as we honor the fallen heroes of our military services who gave their lives for freedom and justice, I wish to remember the fallen heroes of the Christian faith. There are many thousands who have been tortured and killed for the preaching and teaching of Christ and the Kingdom of Heaven. We will start in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles and continue daily with a few of the many accounts found in *Fox's Book of Martyrs*. These were “soldiers of the cross” who preached freedom from sin in God’s army of believers.

Persecution of the believers began almost immediately after the outpouring of Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Preaching of the risen Jesus whom the Jewish leaders had crucified (Romans were only their proxy) pointed to them as guilty of innocent blood. Consequently, they lashed out with a vengeance to squelch this new movement.

Meanwhile, the Church was growing so fast that the Apostles needed help to manage things. They appointed seven deacons to help with the needs of the people. These seven had been faithful disciples of Jesus during His time here. They had all likely been among the seventy sent out by Jesus, two by two, to heal the sick, cast out demons and do miracles, signs, and wonders.

One of the seven deacons was Stephen. Acts 6:8 says, ***“And Stephen, full of faith and power (of the Holy Ghost), did great wonders and miracles among the people.”*** As he preached Jesus many of the synagogue disputed with him, but their arguments were futile against his wisdom and the Spirit within him.

He was hauled into the high priest and tried before the council. He preached the scriptural history that led up to that time. He accused them of historically killing the prophets of God. As he was preaching to them, they saw his face (Acts 6:15) as the countenance of an angel. At the conclusion of his message, Stephen had an open vision and declared to them in Acts 7:56, ***“I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.”*** That “got their goat” and they rushed upon him. They cast him out of the city and stoned him to death. Young Saul watched over their coats as they killed Stephen.

Stephen became the first recorded martyr for the gospel of Jesus Christ. He was a hero in the Lord’s army. He was fearless. We should also fearlessly declare the word of the Lord even though the social and political climate are becoming increasingly hostile to it.