

August 11

Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life. Revelation 2:10

WE are to anticipate a second attack upon the true church (not upon the nominal system), and this may mean, as in the case of John the Baptist, a second and a seeming-

F437 "Believers are but following the footsteps of Jesus -- taking up their cross to follow him... The language of his heart, as he came to John at Jordan, was prophetically foretold, "Lo I come -- in the volume of the book it is written of me -- to do thy will, O God. I delight to do thy will, O my God..." (Psa. 40:7,8; Heb. 10:7)"

R5440 "Because Thy loving kindness is better than life, my lips shall praise Thee."-Psalms 63:3...

This loving favor of God, which is so appreciated by the true saints, is not a favor respecting future prospects and hopes merely, but it is the blessed possession also of the present life...

Are we willing to bear the hatred, the scorn, the contumely, which loyalty to the Truth brings? Is our Father's loving favor more, far more, to us than the favor and smiles of the whole world--even more, far more to us than life itself?"

(Rev 2:8-10 KJV) "And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write... {10} Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer...be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."

R5992 "Smyrna means bitter. Myrrh and Marah are kindred words. This stage of the Christian Church was the period of most bitter persecution, under the Roman Emperors from Nero to Diocletian...

Pagan Rome, here symbolized as the Devil, has been the most devilish of all earthly governments, when viewed in the light of its bloody persecutions. The ten symbolic days refer to the last and most severe persecution under the Roman Emperors--that of the reign of Diocletian, A.D. 303-313. Those who have read the history of this period can understand the depths of the words, "that ye may be tried." Some of the most sublime pictures of Christian endurance that the world has ever seen were enacted during the Smyrna period of the Church. The call was for faithfulness unto death; the promise was that the overcomers should "not be hurt of the Second Death," but should receive the Crown of Life--immortality."

(Phil 3:8-10 KJV) "...I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ... {10} That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being

ly complete victory of the Babylonish woman and her paramour, the world, over the faithful members of the body of Christ in the flesh. We shall certainly not be surprised if the matter so result; but this and all things must work together for good to those who love the Lord. We must all die to win our

made conformable unto his death;"

R5913 OUR LORD JESUS' INSPIRING PROMISE *"Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a Crown of Life."*--Rev. 2:10.

THESE are the words of our glorified Lord, given through St. John the Revelator on the Island of Patmos. This thrilling exhortation is given to the Church, to those who have entered into a special contract, a special covenant with the Lord. The invitation of the present time, to *suffer* with Jesus that we may *reign* with Him, implies the attainment of membership in His Body. His members are His disciples; they have been invited to walk in His steps.

It is required of these that they continue to hold fast the faith that first led them to make a consecration. They are to continue in this attitude through evil report and through good report, to follow their Leader "whithersoever He goeth." They must not faint before they reach the end of the journey. The world, the flesh and the Adversary will try to dissuade them and turn them back-- try to cause them to think that the invitation they have received is an intangible, impossible thing.

A faithful servant is one who demonstrates himself worthy of his master's confidence, one who can always be relied upon. Daily we are proving our loyalty or our disloyalty. "The Lord your God doth prove you." He proves us to see if we are worthy--to see whether we love *Him* best or love *self* best, to see if our confidence in Him is such that we will lay aside everything else to win this great Prize which He has offered, to see whether we are following a mere temporary impulse, whether we are trying to grasp this beautiful thing, this Crown of Life, without appreciation of its cost.

In one of His parables, our Lord represents some who, when the sun of persecution arises, are not sufficiently loyal to the principles of righteousness to stand. They become offended. They wither away. So this word *faithful* seems particularly to signify *loyalty*, including also the thought of being *full of faith*. God's children are to be full of faith, and those in whom God can have faith--those proving worthy of His entire confidence.

Our Lord will say to such as are wholly faithful to the end of the race, "Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things; enter thou into the

heavenly prize beyond the veil. The Elijah class this side of the veil must and will be vanquished, but the apparent defeat only hastens the Kingdom glories. Z. '04-63 R3326:6

joy of thy Lord!" These shall have "a Crown of Life." Their loyalty must be proved even unto death. This does not mean merely that they shall *die* as a consequence of their consecration to the Lord; for there will be two classes of those who thus die--the Little Flock will die sacrificially, and the Great Company will die through "the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the Day of the Lord Jesus."

"Unto death," therefore, would in this text mean a faithfulness which would persist until the sacrifice is finished in death, a faithfulness ready to encounter death at any moment, which would lead to the performance of the Covenant of Sacrifice even unto its consummation.

THE FADELESS CROWN OF LIFE

The thought in respect to the receiving of the Crown is that it confers great honor. In the Olympian games of olden time a crown was given which was usually of laurel leaves; and great victors on battle-fields received crowns of laurel--the laurel being an evergreen shrub or tree, symbolizing that which endures. The Apostle used this illustration as picturing the high honor to be bestowed upon the faithful Church. There is a great Prize to be given. There is an election going on. It is for each individual to make his calling and election sure.-- 2 Peter 1:10,11.

Each one who is victorious will receive a Crown of Life. It will not be a crown that will soon fade, or one that will last only a certain number of years, but a crown of *everlasting life*. And not only so, but the Lord shows us that this crown of everlasting life will be a crown of *superior life*--life on the *very highest plane*. Those who attain Restitution during the Millennial Age will have everlasting life on the human plane. The angels will have everlasting life on the spirit plane. But this *Crown of Life* given to the "more than conquerors" will be the very highest form of spirit life--immortality--far above all other planes of life, as the special reward for being victors in this race. "Let us so run that we may obtain." The goal is near!

"Run on, my soul, undaunted,
Where duty shines before,
Though deserts blaze around thee
And Jordans surge and roar;
The land on this side Jordan
Is not thy birthright blest;
Speed on, and find thy Canaan
And enter into rest."

R3325 (From Harvest Truth Database V5.0) BARGAINS THAT WERE COSTLY

--MATT. 14:1-12.--MARCH 13--

Golden Text:--"Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."--Rev. 2:10.

JOHN THE BAPTIST had been imprisoned about a year when he was beheaded, as narrated in this lesson. He had preached only about a year, but in that time evidently made a profound impression throughout Palestine--an impression, however, which signally failed to accomplish the purpose intended by him--failed to prepare the hearts of the people, through repentance and contrition for sin, to receive Jesus as the Messiah. Josephus supposes that he was confined in a dungeon connected with the castle Macherus. Geike gives

us his opinion of the kind of dungeon in these words: "Perhaps a cage of iron bars like one I saw at Gaza, to which friends of the prisoner could come with food or for gossip, but with no conveniences or provision of any kind for living or sleeping, and only a bare stone floor." This would account for John's ability to send his disciples to Jesus, inquiring, "Art thou he that should come, or look we for another?" We cannot wonder that his experiences were in some respects disappointing to him, though from our standpoint we

can see that he did the work which the Father intended. This may serve as a lesson to us. We, too, should do our parts faithfully as unto the Lord and leave all the results in his hands, assured of his wisdom and power to overrule all things to the final accomplishment of his gracious purposes. The words of the poet are appropriate to John and to many other faithful souls,--

"We live in deeds, not years; in thoughts, not breaths;
In feelings, not in figures on a dial. He most lives
Who thinks most, feels the noblest, acts the best.
That life is long which answers life's great end."

As there is a striking resemblance between John and Elijah, his type, so there is a strong resemblance between the experiences of John and those of the faithful Church,--the great antitype of Elijah. While Elijah fled from Ahab, his real persecutor was Jezebel, who sought his life. So John the Baptist was apprehended and finally executed by Herod, but his real opponent was Herod's wife, Herodias. Similarly the greater Elijah, the faithful body of Christ in the flesh, has suffered and will yet suffer further at the hands of civil power, yet the real persecutor behind the civil power has been the antitypical Jezebel mentioned in Revelation 2:20-- the antitypical Herodias--the nominal Church adulterously allied to the kingdoms of this world while nominally espoused to Christ. All Bible students will recognize the various pictures of this apostasy in Revelation, whether they understand the resemblance distinctly or not.

HEROD, HERODIAS AND SALOME

Herod the Great left several sons ambitious to be his successor. Herodias married the eldest of these, anticipating that thus she would become the queen. The Roman Emperor decided otherwise and chose Antipas, the Herod of this lesson. Thereupon Herodias, still strong-willed and ambitious to be a queen, brought her captivating influences to bear upon Antipas, induced him to repudiate his former wife, and to accept her as queen instead. John the Baptist, preaching against sin, had evidently declared in public against this unlawful union--declared that Herod and his wife were living in adultery--the king separated from his own wife and improperly associated with his brother Philip's wife. We cannot wonder that such haughty, ambitious, and lawlessly disposed persons as Herod and Herodias must have been should feel resentment against any preacher who would dare to call in question the conduct of the regal pair. The result was the imprisonment of John. Evidently this course was instigated by Herodias, who had everything to fear from John's preaching. If Herod should feel conscience-stricken, or if the people should become aroused to such an extent as to influence his course aside from his conscience, the results would surely be disastrous to her interests. She would not only lose the high social position she had sacrificed her life to attain, but she would lose everything and become a homeless wretch. Evidently she strove to incite her husband to put John to death at the time he was imprisoned; but her influence was offset by Herod's fear of the effect of such a course upon the people, who esteemed John to be a prophet.

The queen, still plotting, determined to take advantage of the king's birthday festival. She knew the king's disposition, and that on such occasions it was customary to have great hilarity and to use intoxicating beverages with more than usual freedom. It was the custom of the time for such gatherings of men to be entertained by dancing girls in more or less transparent garments, executing voluptuous dances; and the queen arranged that the king's party, as a special honor, on this occasion should be served by her daughter by her former marriage, Salome. Her scheme was extremely successful: the king and his courtiers were charmed, and instead of the paltry gift usual on such occasions, the king, under the heat of wine and his admiration for his adopted daughter, told her to ask whatever she desired--even to the half of his kingdom (Mark says).

THE KING'S BAD BARGAIN

Only a judgment unbalanced by excitement and alcohol could have made so rash a promise, and bound it with several oaths, as the original indicates. Here is one of the advantages possessed by the Lord's people. They are not only protected from such excesses and the distortions of natural judgment caused thereby, but additionally, as the Apostle intimates, they receive the "spirit of a sound mind." (2 Tim. 1:7.) The mind of Christ, the disposition of Christ, lifts the heart from such follies and places it upon more reasonable things. It gives us a truer estimation of values. Whereas the spirit of the world, the spirit of pride, the spirit of ambition no less than the spirit of envy, tends to pervert the judgment, to give false conceptions of value.

Along this line we call to mind various bad bargains: amongst others that of Esau, who for a mess of pottage sold his birthright as the first-born of Isaac, the natural heir of the Abrahamic promise. We call to mind Judas' bad bargain, by which he received thirty

pieces of silver, sold his Lord, and lost everything. Herod's was one of these bad or costly bargains. He lost his peace of mind as the lesson records--"The king was sorry." We may be sure that his mind was frequently disturbed with the thought of his injustice, and the further thought that quite probably his crime was against one of the Lord's special favorites--against a prophet. The popularity of Jesus did not evidently become so general until after John's death. Herod, hearing of the matter about that time, was perplexed, and wondered whether or not there might be some truth in the Grecian theories that the dead were not dead, but had power to communicate through other living persons, after the manner of spirits through mediums in the present day. His mind was troubled, yet he was not penitent.

Similar conditions prevail today: people do those things which they recognize to be wrong, they violate their consciences, they feel sorry; yet this is not the godly sorrow, for, as the Apostle explains, a godly sorrow--a sorrow of the kind which God recognizes and appreciates--leads to repentance. Every other sorrow is apt to have an injurious effect merely, but a godly sorrow is profitable. It leads to repentance, to reformation, to reconciliation with God through his appointed provision in Jesus. Let us as the Lord's people seek to be filled with the Lord's spirit, and proportionately emptied of the worldly spirit, the spirit of intoxication and the spirit of self-will, and have the spirit of a new mind, of a sound mind. Yet if any find himself in sin through yielding to the desires of the flesh, let him remember that each step in the downward way is a step to be retraced if ever any good shall result, or is to be attained in the future. Let such make haste at any cost to seek the Lord, and to be purged, washed, cleansed, in the merit of the precious blood, and henceforth more than ever be on their guard against sin.

DID JOHN ACT IMPRUDENTLY?

It is not for us to sit in judgment upon the course of John the Baptist, to determine whether or not he exceeded his duty in his criticism of the king and queen. We are inclined, however, to think that he did exceed his duty. So far as we may be able to judge, there were many officials at the time against whom serious charges might have been brought by Jesus and the apostles, yet we have no evidence that any of these ever took the course which John took. Jesus was before Pilate, and, later on, was before this very Herod, yet we have no record that he ever said a word on the subject concerning which John felt free to speak; Paul was personally before Agrippa and Felix and others prominent in that time, some of whom, according to history, were disreputable men, yet he made no personal attack upon them, and his only appeal was to Agrippa, "I would that thou wert altogether as I am, except these bonds," and this was in reply to Agrippa's remark, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian."

In our understanding of the teachings of the Scriptures it is not the duty of the Lord's people to go through the world rebuking sin, but preaching the Gospel. It is the Gospel, which we preach by our words and by our lives, that is the "power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." We emphasize this, because it is our observation that some of the Lord's people feel it their duty to copy John's course in such matters rather than to copy the Lord Jesus and the apostles, and we believe that herein they err. The Gospel is not sent to break men's hearts but to bind up the broken-hearted--to heal those whose hearts are already broken. Sin and its natural penalties are the sledgehammers which are breaking men's hearts. The great time of trouble which is approaching is God's method apparently for the breaking of the hearts of the whole world--to prepare them for the balm of Gilead and the general blessings of the Millennial age which shall follow it. He who uses the Gospel as a hammer has mistaken his commission, which for the whole Christ reads, "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach good tidings to the meek, to bind up the broken-hearted," etc.--Isa. 61:1.

A PARENT'S INFLUENCE, FOR GOOD OR EVIL

The power of Herodias over Herod is illustrated by her power over her daughter Salome. The king's generous offer must have carried weight in the mind of a young girl. Riches, splendors, apparel, palaces, apparently flitted before her mind; but as her previous course had been under her mother's direction, she now sought the mother's advice, "What shall I ask?" (Mark 6:24.) Here we have an illustration of parental influence. Evil woman as she was, Herodias evidently had retained the affection of her daughter and her absolute confidence and obedience. It was hers to direct the young mind into good or evil channels. To some extent this is true of every parent, particularly of every mother. How great, then, is the responsibility of fathers and mothers for the course of their children! The spirit of a sound mind in the Lord's people will certainly prompt them to use this mighty influence, which is theirs by natural relationship and

opportunity, so as to guide those under their direction into right paths.

Alas, how some, even Christian mothers, fail to seize such opportunities and to direct their children in the heavenly ways. They seem to have so much of the worldly spirit themselves that, even while desiring to sacrifice their own earthly interests for the cause of the Lord and to lay up treasure in heaven, they shrink from having their children participate, failing to realize that wisdom's ways are ways of pleasantness and that all other paths lead to present and future trouble. They fail to appreciate the Apostle's words, "Present your bodies living sacrifices, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service." Every other course is unreasonable, irrational, unwise.

Some one has put these words into the mother's mouth in answer to the daughter's desires for the great things proffered her by the king: "Little fool, you know not what you ask: what would all these things be to you and me unqueened and outcast, as we may be any day if John the Baptist live?" The mother's thought evidently was that with the Prophet out of the way all other advantages were accessible to herself and her daughter. She bade her daughter ask for the head of the Prophet and that at once, here, now, on a charger (one of the large platters used at the feast). Haste was deemed necessary lest the king's ardor should cool and his better judgment take control--while the flush of excitement and liquor was upon him, and while his counselors were present who had heard the oath, and before whom any indecision in respect to a prisoner would stultify himself. The king yielded, yet Herodias was not saved from the fate she dreaded; for history records that within ten years her ambition prompted Herod, against his better judgment, to solicit at Rome an additional dignity. The request was refused, and Herod was deprived of his dominion and banished to Lyons in Gaul, where he died.

POSSIBILITIES OF THE FUTURE TO US

We have already referred to the fact that John the Baptist was an antitype to Elijah, and to the fact that the Gospel Church, Head and body, the Christ in the flesh, is still the higher and grander antitype. For eighteen centuries or more this grander Elijah has been preaching righteousness in the world and calling for repentance, etc., announcing the coming of the Christ, the glorified Church, as the Kingdom of God to judge and to bless the world. As Elijah only found a few loyal to God in Israel, so Elijah the second found only a few ready to meet Jesus in the flesh, and similarly the great antitypical Elijah (the Church in the flesh) has found only a few, a little flock, to heed and to properly prepare for the Kingdom. Nevertheless it is the work designed, and, as foretold by the Prophet Malachi, the failure to accomplish larger results means that the Kingdom will be introduced not peaceably but forcefully; that in order to the establishment of the King of Glory as the Prince of the earth it will be necessary to smite the nations with the rod of iron, to break them in pieces as a potter's vessel, that all the Gentiles may seek unto the Lord, and that the knowledge of the Lord may fill the whole earth,

that his Kingdom may come, and his will be done on earth as in heaven.

Another point here: The first Jezebel persecuted the first Elijah so that he fled into the wilderness, and even after his coming again and performing a great miracle and turning the hearts of some to the Lord, he was a second time obliged to flee from Jezebel, who sought his life. In the case of the second Elijah, John the Baptist, the experiences were somewhat similar, and the Herodias Jezebel succeeded eventually in accomplishing the destruction of the Prophet. In the case of the third Elijah (the Church in the flesh) the woman Jezebel is mentioned by name (Rev. 2:20); and her pernicious work, the flight of the Church into the wilderness (Rev. 12:6), and her return from the wilderness condition since Reformation times are all known. Now ⁽¹⁾we are to anticipate a second attack upon the true Church (not upon the nominal system), and this may mean, as in the case of John the Baptist, a second and a seemingly complete victory of the Babylonish woman and her paramour, the world, over the faithful members of the body of Christ in the flesh. We shall certainly not be surprised if the matter so results; but this and all things must work together for good to those who love the Lord. We must all die to win our heavenly prizes beyond the veil. The Elijah class this side the veil must and will be vanquished, but the apparent defeat only hastens the Kingdom glories, powers and blessings promised. "Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life."

GO TELL IT TO JESUS

The disciples of John knew where to go with the message--where to find sympathy and consolation in respect to their loss. There is a lesson for us in this. To whom shall we go with trials, difficulties, sorrows, troubles, disappointments? The Lord invites us to come to him with everything which is too heavy for ourselves, with every care. He cares for us and will grant the blessing to trusting souls. Doubtless those who went to Jesus became his disciples, and thus their trials in connection with their leader and teacher brought them into closer knowledge and fellowship with the great Teacher. And so it will be doubtless with those who are the friends of the Lord's people at the present time: the vengeance of the antitypical Jezebel upon the antitypical Elijah will move their friends and associates to still greater love and interest, and will be the means of attracting more closely to the Lord the "Great Company."

OUR GOLDEN TEXT

Those who prepared the lesson evidently did not see that John the Baptist belongs to a separate class of the saved from those addressed in the text. No promise was made to John of a crown of life. That promise belongs to us, the Gospel Church--called chosen, and faithful. John, however, will have a great blessing, for we mark again our Lord's words, "There hath not arisen a greater prophet than John the Baptist--and yet I say unto you that the least in the Kingdom is greater than he."

⁽¹⁾ Aug. 11 Manna, Rev. 2:10

R2108 (From Harvest Truth Database V5.0 2008)

THE FIRST CHRISTIAN MARTYR

--FEB. 21.--ACTS 6:8-15; 7:54-60.--

"Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."--Rev. 2:10.

APPARENTLY Stephen's martyrdom occurred not a great while after Pentecost, but the interim had been a period of considerable progress. At the time of the ascension "about one hundred and twenty" were reckoned as being in full and deep fellowship in Christ; ten days later at Pentecost three thousand converts were added; shortly after five thousand more as recorded in our last lesson; later (Acts 5:14) "multitudes, both men and women, were added to the Lord;" still later, "the number of the disciples was multiplied in Jerusalem greatly, and a great multitude of priests were obedient to the faith." (Acts 6:1-7.) This period of gathering the ripe wheat and establishing them in the doctrines of Christ was a very necessary prelude to the period of trial, persecution and suffering which shortly followed. The persecution, however, was no less a divine mercy than the previous peace and prosperity: the divine rule for the Gospel Church evidently is that each member shall be "made perfect through suffering." The stoning of Stephen was merely the beginning of the general persecution which in one form or another has continued ever since, and must continue until the last members of the body of Christ shall have proven themselves faithful even unto death and been accounted worthy of the crown of life mentioned in our golden text.

Stephen, it will be remembered, was chosen as one of the assis-

tants of the apostles and was known as a deacon--minister or servant--the original intention being that the service should be chiefly with reference to the temporal interests of the Church. His choice would indicate that he was considered at the time a man of ability, and that faithfulness to the work entrusted to him led on to still greater privileges and opportunities for service. Accordingly we find him in this lesson ministering spiritual things with imbueing of the spirit and ability closely approaching that of the apostles. He was full of faith and power, says our common version, and no doubt truly, but the oldest manuscripts render this "full of *grace* and power." Both were true, because he could not have had the grace and the power without the faith. "This is the victory which overcometh the world, even your faith." In Stephen's case the faith working by love had produced zeal for the Lord and his cause; and the faith and zeal blended with the spirit of holiness gave Stephen extraordinary grace and power, as pointed out in *verse 8*. And the same combination will produce like grace and power in all of the Lord's people in proportion as these elements of character are found in each.

Tradition has it that Stephen's ability as a speaker (*verses 9,10*) brought him into special prominence and that as a religious logician he met with the learned men of his time, amongst whom it is said Saul of Tarsus was one. The Jews, while in a general sense one in

religious matters, were nevertheless broken up into various little cliques and schools of thought, much after the manner of the denominations of Christendom today. The classes here mentioned as disputants with Stephen are supposed to have represented the advanced philosophies of that day, combined with Judaism; but all of their philosophy could not cope with the wisdom and spirit of the truth which were with Stephen. Naturally this led wicked hearts to envy, malice and hatred; for those who are not above all things lovers of the truth are always moved to more or less hatred when successfully opposed by the truth.

(11-14) Many have supposed that Stephen met his death at the hands of a mob. But this is incorrect. Those who were his enemies because unable to resist the force of his arguments had no authority to stone him, nor did they wish to appear before the people in the light of persecutors of their opponent. They therefore suborned or procured witnesses outside of their own cliques to bring charges against Stephen before the Sanhedrin and then while he was disputing with them the official representatives of the Sanhedrin came upon him and "caught him" and brought him before the council,--as though caught in the very act of blasphemy.

At the trial the witnesses testified falsely in the sense that they misrepresented the words and arguments of Stephen, putting them in a false light. There was, nevertheless, probably considerable truth in the charge that Stephen said that Jesus of Nazareth would destroy their city and change the customs of Moses. Had they confined themselves to a strict statement of the matter as Stephen represented it, they would not have been false witnesses; but, evidently anxious to serve those who employed them as witnesses, they exaggerated Stephen's statements to the extent of misrepresentation of certain connecting facts and statements in his discourse.

(15) It is recorded that when the apostles, Peter and John, stood before a similar council, a short time previous, their judges marveled at their courage in view of the fact that they were unlearned men. So also Stephen was courageous. Notwithstanding the fact of his arrest, and that he was on trial, and that if found guilty the punishment would be death by stoning, according to the law, Stephen was not daunted. Instead of a look of fear and servility, or of anger, malice, hatred and defiance, the record is that they beheld his face "as it had been the face of an angel;"--a face beaming with love, kindness, interest in their welfare, desire to do them good, of purity and holiness of motive, combined with humble confidence in God and fearlessness of men. We believe that to a greater or less extent this is the case with all who receive the holy spirit, in proportion as they progress in the knowledge, faith, love, zeal and character of Christ their Lord. This change does not come instantaneously; it comes gradually. The spirit of the world places the marks of selfishness and hardness upon the countenances of all the slaves of sin, in proportion as they are faithful thereto. But when the spirit of the truth is received and these become freed from the slavery to sin and become the servants of righteousness, the result is a proportionate displacement of the marks of slavery upon the countenance and an illumination instead, which more and more approaches the angelic. Look the worldly man or woman in the face, and see how the cares and battles of and for sin have left their traces: look then into the faces of those who are fully and intelligently the Lord's, and notice how the marks of care are superseded by a look of confidence and trust and peace proceeding from the hearty acceptance of their new Master's spirit. And this illumination will be found most remarkable and conspicuous when such saints are actively engaged in telling the good tidings, and particularly when opposing the error.

Stephen's discourse before the Sanhedrin (Acts 7:1-53) marks him as having been a man of great ability. It reads more like the language of the Apostle Paul than that of any other New Testament writer. And the Apostle Paul, then Saul of Tarsus, is supposed to have been one of his hearers, a member of the Sanhedrin.

The closing of Stephen's address (*verses 51-53*) laid upon the Jewish people, and especially upon the Jewish Sanhedrin as the representatives of the religious law, the full responsibility for the death of the "Just One"--as his betrayers and murderers. This pointed application of Scripture and facts, as might have been expected, only aroused the evil hearts of the judges. Of those converted by Peter's discourse it was said, "They were pricked to the heart;" but of these it is said, "They were cut to the hearts" by the words of truth--the evil of their natures was aroused to the full, they gnashed on him with their teeth--they were exceedingly incensed.

(55-58) Full of the holy spirit, Stephen was wholly unmoved by their manifestations of anger. He was testifying for God and for the truth, and instead of fear of man his heart was brought into the closer sympathy and union with the Lord. The Lord knew all about the

termination of the trial and what the sentence would be, and no doubt gave Stephen a vision of heavenly glory--of the Father, and of Christ at the right hand of his majesty. This no doubt was for the strengthening of Stephen's own faith for the martyrdom just at hand; and perhaps also intended to act as it did upon his unjust judges. His declaration of the vision which he saw capped the climax of their indignation, at his supposed opposition to God and to Moses and to themselves as representatives of the Law. They construed this to be additional blasphemy--that Jesus of Nazareth, whom they condemned as a blasphemer, and whose crucifixion they had procured, was acceptable to God; and not only so, but made next to the Father--at the right hand of God, or place of power and influence. Using this as a pretext, they terminated the trial and executed the sentence of stoning--stopping their ears as though they would thus say, what no doubt some of them actually felt, that such an exaltation of Jesus next to Jehovah, far above Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the prophets was gross blasphemy which they could not justify themselves in hearing and felt bound to resent by stoning the blasphemer.

According to the Law, those who heard the blasphemy did the stoning; and they laid their outer garments at the feet of Saul, which would seem to indicate that he not only consented to the verdict that Stephen was a blasphemer worthy of death, but that he was one of the leaders in the prosecution, as well as an influential man in the Sanhedrin.

(59-60) Without attempting to dissuade them from their course, Stephen offered up prayer to the Lord, and a beautiful prayer it was--not only for the preservation of his spirit, but also that the sin might not be laid to the charge of his murderers.

Thus he "fell asleep." This testimony respecting Stephen is in full accord with the testimony of other Scriptures. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and the prophets "slept" with their fathers in death; and the Apostle, after enumerating some of the faithful ones of the past (who were stoned, etc., in hope of a better resurrection), grouping them all together, says (Heb. 11:39,40), "These all...received not the promise; God having provided some *better thing for us*, that they without us should not be made perfect." They all are represented as sleeping and waiting for the morning--the resurrection morning--the Millennial morning--the morning of which the prophet David spoke, saying, "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning;" the morning of which the prophet Job spoke, saying, "Hide me in the grave until thy wrath be past [the reign of death during the present age with all of its concomitants of sorrow, trouble and pain, are evidences of divine wrath]. Thou shalt call, and I will answer thee: thou wilt have a desire to the work of thine hands." Our Lord, speaking of the resurrection morn, the same great day of awakening from the sleep of death, corroborates Job's statement, saying, "All that are in the graves shall hear his voice and shall come forth." (John 5:28,29.) Stephen slept with the others, but as one of the overcomers of the new dispensation he will have a share in the first resurrection (Rev. 20:6), and thus awake earlier in the morning than others not winners of the prize of the high calling of this Gospel age.--Psa. 46:5, margin.

The expression "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit" signifies that Stephen understood that the spark of life, the spirit of life, was passing from his control; and by this expression he gave evidence of his faith in a future life, committing it wholly to the care of him who redeemed him from the power of the grave and who is shortly to deliver therefrom all who trust in him.

Stephen's faithful witness unto death was followed in turn by that of many others likewise faithful unto death and heirs of crowns of life according to the promise. The beneficent influences of the gospel of Christ have since Stephen's day so permeated the civilized world, and so affected it, that the followers of Christ are not at present in danger of being stoned to death for preaching his gospel. Nevertheless, the Apostle's words still hold good, "All who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." It is still necessary to suffer with Christ, if we would be glorified with him and share his coming Kingdom. But the persecutions of to-day are more refined than in any previous period. The faithful to-day are not stoned with literal stones or shot with literal arrows or literally beheaded, but it is still true that the wicked shoot out arrows at the righteous, "even *bitter words*," and many because of faithfulness are reproved and slandered and cut off from fellowship--beheaded for the testimony of Jesus. (Rev. 20:4.) Let all such emulate Stephen, the first Christian martyr. Let their testimonies be given with radiant faces like his. Let their eyes of faith perceive Jesus at the right hand of the majesty on high as their Advocate and Deliverer. Let their words be with moderation as were Stephen's, and let it be true of them, as written of him, "full of grace and power" and "filled with the holy spirit."