

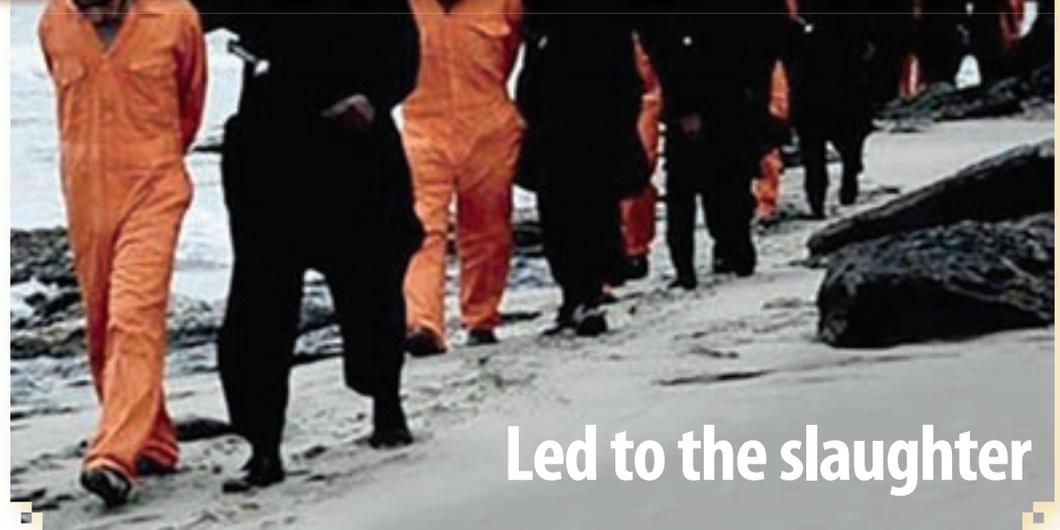


# Faithful Unto Death

The first Christian martyr, Stephen, died saying: “Lord Jesus, receive my Spirit...Lord, do not charge them with this sin...” (Acts 7:59–60). His last words resembled those of our Lord Himself facing death on the cross (Luke 23:34, 46). Saul of Tarsus heard and saw it all while approvingly guarding the clothes of those stoning Stephen to death. Still full of hatred for Jesus, he went on harassing God’s people until, as he headed north to Damascus, Christ intervened and his life took an about-face. Undoubtedly, the Holy Spirit used Stephen’s powerful testimony of faith and forgiveness towards Paul’s conversion.

## Marched to the Slaughter

A few weeks ago, twenty Egyptian Christians and a brother in the Lord from Chad were kidnapped, paraded, and ruthlessly beheaded by hateful men of the Islamic State (IS) in Libya. They were mur-



Led to the slaughter

dered simply for being Christian. Dressed in the orange one-piece IS execution suits, reminiscent of Guantanamo Bay prison uniforms, they were marched handcuffed and leg chained. Each was accompanied by an armed executioner, cowardly hooded, with the sharp throat-cutting knife in his hand. The men knew that they were to be slaughtered. The request of some to have last words over the phone with loved ones in Egypt had been denied.

The official Islamic judgment (fatwa) was that infidels are not entitled to any privileges! **One by one, they were urged repeatedly to recant their faith in Christ. Not one did.**

## In Jesus’ Hands

None stumbled in his walk. Some were clearly whispering prayers. In the first YouTube recording, one is heard saying in Arabic, “Jesus, my life is in your hands,” as he felt the knife on his neck. The man beside said, “Amen.” Not an exact

quote of Stephen at his martyrdom, but close enough.

The Gospel knowledge of each of the twenty Egyptians is not clear. At least three were known to have made public professions of faith and several of the others regularly participated in Bible study and prayer meetings. They all came from poor village families; some were illiterate. They went to Libya to work as construction labourers. The Chadian brother was detained because of his public witness to Christ.

## A Narrow Escape

One of a smaller group of Coptic Christians living in the next building reported that their names were also on the list wanted by the “*beastly, heavily-armed men who came in three large pickup trucks.*” The armed men, however, were satisfied to leave with the thirteen Coptic men and six Chadian nationals. They had already



Left: Muslim women join Christians in Egypt mourning the beheading.



kidnapped seven more Egyptian Christians. Screams of some of the younger men were heard as they were beaten and kicked all over their bodies and forced into the vehicles.

**Infidels**

Some of the captors were not Libyan, but clearly Egyptian Muslim fanatics. Speaking in Egyptian Arabic, they shouted at their victims, "Infidels! Infidels!" (Kofar) as they dragged them away. Other Egyptian Muslim labourers in the compound were also terrorized by what they heard and saw. None dared to challenge the "human

beasts." They too are leaving Libya in growing numbers because they are being coerced to join the murderous Jihadist gangs.

Five of the Chadians denied being Christian, made an Islamic vow and were released. The sixth refused to deny Christ, saying, "My God is the same as these Egyptian Christians; if you kill them, you kill me too."

**Faithful unto Death**

One thing is certain—none of the twenty-one was willing to spare his own life by denying Christ and accepting to convert to Islam! It seems they were all kept in one place over the weeks of

captivity and encouraged one another to remain loyal to Christ.

Another of the men initially sought after managed to hide with the aid of a Muslim co-labourer. He later escaped the area and returned to Egypt. He confirmed that the captors were openly amazed and outraged by the resolve of the men not to convert to Islam, even when repeatedly threatened by death.

**Martyrdom Fruit**

The mother of one of the young men was interviewed on TV a few days later. She was asked what she wanted done to the murderers. Sobbing, she said: "We forgive them and pray for the Lord's mercy for them and for their families." The interviewer, a secularist Muslim, afterwards commented: "Now I understand how Christians take to heart the glorious words of Jesus about loving ones' enemies and forgiving those who persecute them."

A woman with a distinctly Muslim name later blogged: "Our murderous terrorists and suicide bombers are considered martyrs when they die in action. But they are not.

*These brave Christians are, just in the footsteps of Jesus, the noblest man that ever walked on earth."*

One of the first TV commentators, a Muslim, viewing the video of these gruesome beheadings, reported: "Yes, I heard with my own ears and saw with my own eyes their lips in prayer...I heard the one calling on Jesus to receive his life...what courage, what faith...this must be what God wants humans to be like!"

Hani, a Coptic young man, blogged: "Lord Jesus, thank you for these brothers. They taught me two things—one, it is for real that we must be ready to die for your sake. You died for me; two, I am not ready to do so unless you enable me..."

**Top:** Nine of the martyrs; Tribute to the unity of faith of the Chadian brother; **Below:** Egyptians running away from Libya

*"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall ... persecution ... or sword? As it is written: "For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter." —Romans 8:31-36*

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