

Baba Ralph and the Prison Escape

(From the Sentinel Explorer)

Dr. Ralph Bethea has never taken the cautious road in reaching the world for Christ. "Baba Ralph" has been instrumental in leading many to the Lord in Afghanistan and other Middle East nations. He recently he went into Teheran, Iran to help six of his young evangelists who had been imprisoned for winning hundreds of students to Christ in the University of Iran. Bethea says he has been wanted by the Iranian Islamic government since 1992. The Lord directed him to offer himself in exchange for the release of the young men. The secret police accepted the offer and sent a man to check up on the captives. Some of the Christian young men followed him and discovered their location.

The men were found to be in an outside cell of a prison set in an open field. "Thankfully" Bethea says, "the prison was not well built. I had always wanted to try a cool maneuver I saw 40 years ago in a John Wayne movie where he pulled the bars out of the cell wall. I asked the Lord for permission, rented a big truck and a long cable and joy upon joy, pulled those suckers right out of there late that night! In fact, we pulled a 12x12 ft. entire section of the wall out which opened up the adjacent cell to our boys. Turns out, they were political prisoners (out type folks) who had all accepted Christ from the witness of our boys a week earlier. So all six of our boys and eight of our new bold believers jumped on the truck and we scurried out of town laughing and praising God. Now, I know this is not God's best plan and many would have done better, but, God forgive me, I did enjoy it so much! Our Lord allows us a few indulgences and the boys thought it was real "cowboy stuff." I did so enjoy myself! Christianity does not have to be bland!"

They dropped their new brothers in Christ off near their homes and drove several hours to one of their "safe houses" where they had an old-fashioned "praisin'." When the worship got too loud several Iranian police officers and a magistrate came to the door and arrested everyone. Bethea says, "I turned out to be in their top 20 most wanted! For 14 years now our boys have blamed me as the instigator and their hirer every time they get caught printing Bibles or distributing tracts or CDs. The legend of "RaphAH" just keeps growing, even though I am in Iran only a couple of times a year now. I am having to slow down in my late 50s! It has, however, protected our boys hundreds of times and serves the cause of Christ well!"

Ramez, the magistrate, (a code name) threw Dr. Ralph and the young men into prison. The next morning he had them brought into an empty courtroom. "I asked him to let the boys go as I had hired them to help me. [This was true as Bethea pays each boy \$5 a year for their "travel expense."] When Ramez dismissed the boys, they refused to go saying, "RaphAH is our Baba and elder. He brought the salvation news of Christ to most of us." When he asked the boys what they were doing in Iran, one answered, "We are taking over Iran in the mighty name of Christ." As the boys went on to preach the gospel to Ramez, Bethea was worried thinking, "We were going to jail for a long time!"

Bethea says, "Magistrate Ramez sent the boys back to their cell and had the bailiff haul me to his 'personal interrogation room.' As soon as we were alone, he unlocked my handcuffs and began to weep! 'For four years I have prayed to meet you, RaphAH! I was a close friend of your old friend Basrah was killed by Saddam just before Baghdad fell to the Americans. He told me about you and Christ the Savior many times." Ramez deeply regretted not accepting Christ then. As Ralph was the only other believer he had heard of, Ramez and his wife had prayed for four years that God would bring Ralph to them. Ramez said, "The secret police discovered your safe house last year and I took the responsibility from them of watching it, hoping you would show up one day. Today God has answered my prayers. He captured you, heh?"

Then Ramez opened a side door and his wife stepped in. "Please, show us the conversion."

"I cannot convert you," Bethea answered him, "but I can lead you to the Savior, God's anointed King who died for your sins so that you might live forever with Him. On earth, God's Son became as us. He was called the MessiYAH or Christ. He died on a cross for your sins. He wants to spiritually enter your life as Lord and Savior and give you eternal life today. He will convert you! Ramez and his wife wept for joy as they repented and came to Christ.

As they rejoiced, Bethea says, "The Holy Spirit told me a strange thing. Ramez was to send us to a maximum security Iranian prison so that when the Lord got us out, it would not be blamed upon Ramez. God had future uses for Ramez remaining undercover! Ramez objected strongly. 'That prison is nearby but nobody gets out alive. There are not even beds or toilets.'

"I assured him God would protect us (even though I did gulp hard at his description). We forced Ramez to act out his part, which really protected him later. The boys all agreed with the plan.

"The maximum security prison was definitely high security, surrounded by three electrified fences, patrol dogs and armed guard towers. The cell blocks were solid. Had we made a huge mistake? Had I missed God? I have already lived ten great lifetimes, but the boys were just 20-24 years old!"

The prison cell was the filthiest, stinking cell I have ever seen. Several of the boys vomited. Small flashes of natural fear crossed a few of their eyes, but they soon recovered their faith. I hoped they had not seen the same in my own. I wondered why they had left us all together. I had expected solitary, at least for me. Then we found out why.

They threw two old, craggy, stinking wild men into our cell. I had heard of this. Insane maniacs are used to destabilize political prisoners. These guys had long hair all bushed out with penetrating strange eyes, one with azure blue and the other had emerald green eyes. They tried intimidating us but the boys were used to demonic oppression and started to cast out the demons.

Some of the boys started praising the Lord in preparation when these two men fell on their knees, lifting their hands to heaven and praising the Lord also! We were astonished! These were not insane maniacs nor demon possessed! They were Old Testament "Nabii" (prophets)! We all soon sensed it! These were spiritual prophets!

They knew the Torah of Moses and most of the Old Testament prophets in Hebrew like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Joel and Zechariah. They did not know of YAHUWshua the MessiYAH, so the boys took turns explaining the Gospel of Christ to them. They wept with great joy and received the Savior readily!

We knew then why our precious Lord had sent us there. These Nabii were already famous across Teheran and some other regions of Iran. They had publicly called the President of Iran a "son of Satan" in a presidential political rally! Only their "holy men" stature kept them from being killed. They had been in this prison for many years. They used the insanity bluff to get to know all the political dissidents in the prison.

They wanted us to go with them that night!

"How can we even get out of our own cell?" I asked.

"God has wondrous ways," they grinned.

The next three nights were some of the most marvelous hours of my entire life. The Nabii had dug tunnels all under that prison complex connecting most cell blocks. Most of the guards or their families had been healed

by the Nabii's prayers and they turned a blind eye if they saw us. We led 87 of the top political dissidents to present day Iran to Christ, including several former top ministers who had gotten fed up with President Mahmoud's lies and dangerous rhetoric. It was a human gold mine for Kingdom missionary Christians!

After four of our boys volunteered to stay behind and disciple the Nabii and new believers, we began to pray for a way to escape. We invited the Nabii to join us. They refused!

"Why? Have we offended you?" I asked.

"We do not get offended," they replied, "but we do not waste our God's important time with such trivial matters! You should ask us first about small details." Their eyes danced with their delight at rebuking us.

"Well, just pardon us," I retorted. "I did not know escaping from Iran's maximum security political prison is any small detail."

"It is if you have one of these," he grinned as he pulled out a key embedded in his bushy, unkempt hair.

He unlocked our cell, walked down several corridors to a rough wall of stones which both Nabii scampered up like squirrels on a tree hole. Soon, they led us to an ingenious passage outside the prison. They hugged us, asked [us] to come back when we "get some free time" and promised to take good care of our four boys excitedly staying behind to disciple the new believers.

Never have I met a more amazing outpouring of the Spirit of the Almighty God.

Ralph Bethea's ministry, No Greater Love International, supports 436 "underground" evangelists serving Christ in Iran. He says, on average, each of these brothers leads one or two Iranian students a day to Christ. Bethea is currently setting up his first Royal Ranch in South Africa to house and educate from 300-500 AIDS orphans.

Source: NGLI's December, 2006 ministry report. Dr. Ralph Bethea can be reached at No Greater Love International, P. O. Box 1976, Claremore, OK 74018, E-mail: <mailto:ralphcbethea@yahoo.com>