

An amazing escape from persecution

Yonas is a young Ethiopian teacher. After qualifying, in his first year of teaching he obtained a teaching post close to the Ethiopian–Sudanese border. During his first year his school was raided by the police and several teachers were shot. He was accused of helping people escape into Sudan and arrested.

After being detained for two months he was released and allowed to go back to teach in the same school. The authorities, however, refused to give him his final full teaching qualification. He was told he needed to go in person to the prison and get a letter saying he had been released and there were no charges against him.

Unfortunately, on return to the prison he was again arrested and this time charged with being a Pentecostal Christian, because he had been involved in Pentecostal meetings among the teachers at the school; a charge which brings a life prison sentence with no release.

Amazingly, while in prison two violent storms occurred which washed away the walls of the prison. During the second storm he escaped and ran for two days and nights back to his home village. When he reached his home, he could not find his parents and their home had been destroyed. He then went to a neighbouring village and found his uncle, who said it was not safe for him to remain there. His uncle gave him money and smuggled him in his car across the border into Sudan.

He could not remain in Sudan because the Sudanese government was returning Ethiopian refugees back to Ethiopia. He then made his own way across the Sahara Desert to Libya but was then captured by Libyan rebels who held him in a basement for two months. They threatened him daily, threatening to shoot him; they made him eat dirt and told him he must write to his family to get money for his release. However, when the Libyan regime changed, he was of no value to his captors, and he was thrown out onto the street.

With further help from his family, he was able to cross the Mediterranean and then eventually came to the UK, where he was eventually granted refugee status.

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