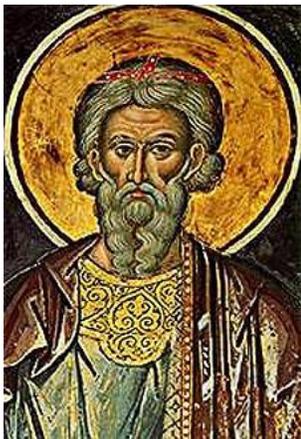


Martyr Arethas and 4,299 Martyrs with him



The Martyr Arethas and with him 4299 Martyrs suffered for the Lord Jesus Christ in the sixth century. Arethas was prefect of the Christian city of Negran in Arabia. The Arabian (or Omirite) king, Dunaan, who was Jewish, decided to eliminate Christianity from the land. He issued an edict that all followers of Christ were to be put to death.

Because the inhabitants of Negran remained faithful to the Lord, Dunaan came with a large army to destroy the city. At the city walls of Negran the king's heralds announced that Dunaan would only spare those who renounced Christ and referred to His Cross as a "sign of malediction."

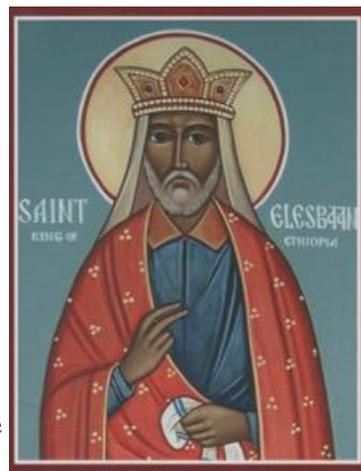
Not daring to assault the Christian city by force, Dunaan resorted to a ruse. Dunaan swore an oath that he would not force the Christians into Judaism, but would merely collect a tribute from Negran. The inhabitants of the city would not heed the advice of Saint Arethas, and putting their trust in Dunaan, they opened the city gates.

The very next day Dunaan gave orders to light an immense fire and throw all the clergy of the city into it in order to frighten the rest of the Christians. 427 men were burned. He also threw the prefect Arethas and the other chief men into prison. Then the oppressor sent his messengers through the city to convert the Christians to Judaism. Dunaan himself conversed with those inhabitants brought from the prisons, saying, "I do not demand that you should renounce the God of heaven and earth, nor do I want you to worship idols, I want merely that you do not believe in Jesus Christ, since the Crucified One was a man, and not God."

The holy martyrs replied that Jesus is God the Word, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, Who for the salvation of mankind was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary. Those suffering said, "We shall not abjure Christ, since He is Life for us. To die for Him is to find Life."

More than four thousand Christians, men, women, both the aged and children, from the city of Negran and surrounding villages suffered martyrdom for Christ.

Blessed Elesbaan, King of Ethiopia



Saint Elesbaan, King of what is now Ethiopia lived when Arabia was ruled by Dunaan, the oppressor of Christians. The pious Elesbaan was unable to look on indifferently as believers in Christ such as St. Arethas were being massacred. He declared war on Dunaan, but his military campaign was unsuccessful.

Wishing to learn the reason for his defeat, Elesbaan, with prompting from above, turned to a certain hermit. He revealed to the emperor that he had proceeded unrighteously in deciding to take revenge against Dunaan, since the Lord had said, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay!" (Heb 10:30).

The hermit counseled Saint Elesbaan make a vow to devote his final days of life to God, to ask forgiveness of God for his self-willed revenge, and then to defeat Dunaan. Saint Elesbaan made the vow to the Lord, and marching off with his army against the enemy a second time, he defeated the wicked Dunaan who committed suicide by drowning himself in the sea. After the victory the saint resigned as emperor, secluded himself within a monastery and for fifteen years he dwelt in strict fasting and asceticism until his repose.