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BIBLE ADVENTURES SCRIPT:

A1729 ~ The Church at Antioch.

Welcome to Bible Adventures. Help for today. Hope for tomorrow. Jesus is Lord of all.

Have you ever moved from a house in one area to another that's a long way away? Packing up and moving takes time and considerable effort. In today's *Bible Adventure*, Christian families are moving from Jerusalem to Antioch in present-day Syria, to avoid persecution for their faith early in the 1st Century after Jesus' death and resurrection.

The savage persecution of believers in Christ that followed on from the martyred death of Stephen made many people consider moving far away from the Temple authorities in Jerusalem. Some travelled distances more than 500 kilometres to places like Antioch. We don't think much about such a distance these days with motor vehicles to carry our goods. But back in those days, donkeys, camels and possibly carts were used for transporting luggage while the owner often walked beside them. This meant that progress from one township to the next village was slow going.

The land of Israel that Jesus walked through was only a small area compared to the nations that were round about. The region had many physical barriers to trouble travellers. There were rivers to cross, deserts to avoid, steep mountain ranges to find pathways through, and robbers and thieves to fight along the way. No nation around Israel or Israel itself had everything it needed for daily life and so the nations depended on one another for the trade of raw materials and finished products. The trade routes passing through Israel were often fought over by competitors trying to gain control.

Antioch was the 3rd-largest city at that time and mainly Gentile. So the arriving believers in Christ began teaching the Gospel to them, even though they hadn't heard about the Gentile Cornelius and his family becoming believers in Christ in Caesarea. As there were many nationalities represented in Antioch, the believers stopped calling themselves 'Jews' or 'Greeks' and took on the name of Christ. They started calling themselves 'Christians'. To be a Christian meant to belong to Christ.

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Because the Lord's hand and power was with the believers, a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord at Antioch. Because the church in Jerusalem was considered 'the mother church' of all churches scattered throughout the Middle East, the apostles watched over the affairs of the new churches that had sprung up. So when the apostles heard that there were many new Gentile converts at Antioch, they sent Barnabas to find out about these new Christians.

Barnabas was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith; and his name means 'the son of encouragement'. Although Jewish himself, Barnabas didn't complain about the Gentiles receiving salvation. He was glad and went to Antioch to help the new believers. This brought more new converts into the church there at Antioch. But Barnabas needed someone to help him in the work of teaching and preaching. He remembered the new apostle Paul and went to Tarsus to find him. Paul came back with Barnabas and they worked together there for a year growing the church.

At this point in time, there were no written records for the new believers in Christ to read and learn. So the task of Paul and Barnabas would have been to use the same teaching for each group. The Gospel of Matthew was thought to be written in Antioch just before the Roman army destroyed Jerusalem in 70 AD. The apostle Matthew wrote to the Jewish believers in their native language and it was probably translated later into Greek.

Although Matthew's Gospel had much material in common with the gospels of Mark and Luke, Matthew focused on the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies. Mark was a close associate of Peter in the early church days but wasn't an apostle. He also was a cousin of Barnabas. Mark went to Antioch as well and later started out with Paul and Barnabas on Paul's first missionary journey. When they arrived at the island of Cyprus, they were fairly close to the Syrian coast so Mark left the other two and returned to Jerusalem.

It may have been during Peter's lifetime or shortly after his death that Mark wrote the Gospel of Mark. It's considered to have been written in the sametime period of 55 AD to 65 AD. The factual, action style of the Gospel of Mark doesn't have themes or topics and it makes this book the most vivid account of the life of Christ among the gospels.

The Gospel of Luke is thought to have been written by 60 AD. Luke himself was a medical doctor and very thorough in his writing. He secured his information from eyewitnesses and he gave all the major facts of Christ's life. His work has been recognised as the most complete account of the life of Jesus. Luke is also thought to be a convert at Antioch and joined Paul for part of his 2nd missionary journey.

And in case you are wondering about the Gospel of John, this wasn't written until nearly the end of that century. It was also quite different from the other three gospels. The apostle John gave evidence of the supernatural powers of Christ in areas of life where ordinary people were helpless.

One of the most important things Paul and Barnabas tried to teach the new converts was Christlikeness. What Christ was like in His very nature, believers in Him need to be the same by God's grace. It takes time to be conformed to the image of God's Son. Undergoing the sorrows and sufferings of living in a fallen world, and the exercise of finding Christ's joy despite pain and trials, change us into Christ's likeness.

Studying and learning the Scripture verses is a big help for believers these days in becoming Christlike. It has God's spoken and inspired words for dealing with disappointment or when evil is spoken about us.

In 1685, a man named Isaac Watts Senior wrote a list of what he considered the most important things for living a Christlike life. At that time, he was in prison for his beliefs, so he sent the list to his family and especially his 11-year-old son, Isaac Watts Junior.

Watts Senior said: "We must endeavour by patient waiting to submit to His will without murmuring; and not to think amiss of His chastening us, knowing that all His works are the product of His infinite wisdom."

Watts' list included these points:

- Frequently read the Holy Scriptures, not as a task but with delight.
- Understand the sinful state and begin to be a praying Christian, remembering that prayer is the best weapon of a believer's defence.
- Remember the hope of salvation founded on Jesus Christ. Always keep in mind that God is our Creator, and serve Him with a willing mind.
- Worship God in God's own way according to the Gospel and not according to the inventions or traditions of men.
- Don't entertain in your hearts doctrines of praying to the saints or to the Virgin Mary or any other creature. Pray that God will give you knowledge of His truth, for you are likely to live in very dangerous times.
- Don't consider hard thoughts of God or of His ways because His people are persecuted, for Jesus Christ Himself was persecuted to death by wicked men for preaching the truth and doing good.
- Be dutiful and obedient to all superiors, your grandparents and in a special manner to your mother.

Young Isaac Watts grew up to become the 'Father of English Hymns' and he wrote such hymn classics as "O God Our Help in Ages Past," "At the Cross", as well as 600 more. He learnt to say the doctrines of the faith so simply but so profoundly in the lyrical poems that he wrote. These were then set to music so all believers in Christ could sing them and foster their spiritual growth.

Another thing Paul and Barnabas were keen to teach the new converts at Antioch was church unity in Christ, although many different cultures and customs were present. Some traditions would have needed to be forgotten or replaced with something profoundly different. For example, practices out of step with Christ's command to "Love you neighbour" would have caused divisions and needed to be replaced by individual Christians. The church had to accept change and all people be considerate of one another.

The Apostle Paul wrote in Philippians, Chapter 1: "Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel."

And in Ephesians, Chapter 4, he said: "I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call – one Lord, one faith, one baptism ..."

Another thing Paul and Barnabas taught those in the new Antioch church was how to tell others about the Good News of the Gospel of Christ. We often refer to this as 'witnessing for Christ'. Yet in the Scriptures, a witness was someone who saw with his own eyes, heard what was said or knew by being a spectator.

Since we have not seen the Lord Jesus nor personally heard His voice, we cannot be witnesses of Him. But we can witness that we believe in Him, He is our Saviour and the changes that He has made in our lives. We need to do this in a gentle and patient manner.

Some people refuse to allow a conversation to talk about religion or Christianity. Such topics can lead to arguments, as many people think they are quite all right as they are and they have no need of a Saviour. Pray that God will lead you to someone willing to listen to you. Their needs may seem great but they may also be prepared to find out about our great God and the amazing sacrifice of His Son Jesus to pay for their sins as well as ours. God promises to look after His own children, so God can meet and deal with all issues such people are struggling with.

May we walk by faith until that day when Christ returns as He has promised! In Matthew, Chapter 16, Verse 27, Jesus said: "For the Son of Man (that's Jesus) is going to come with his angels in the glory of His Father and then He will repay each person according to what he has done."

He also promised in John, Chapter 14, Verse 3: "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also."

The drama is from The Bible In Living Sound.

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