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BIBLE ADVENTURES SCRIPT:

A1766 ~ Paul Sails for Rome.

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

After the Apostle Paul had appealed to Caesar to hear his case of not causing a riot as his Jewish accusers claimed, the Governor Festus of Judea declared that Paul would be sent to Rome to be tried before Caesar. In time, Paul and a group of prisoners, each chained to a Roman soldier, were loaded onto a ship. No ships were going straight across the Mediterranean Sea to Rome at this particular time of the year, as it was known for its storms and unfavourable winds ahead of winter coming. So the ship took a coastal route where it could.

The centurion in charge of the group knew that if he lost any of the prisoners on board, he would receive the death penalty. But he had respect for Paul and his travelling companions, who were Luke the physician and Aristarchus from Thessalonica. He even gave Paul permission to visit his friends in Sidon.

All the ports that the ship stopped at are listed in Acts, Chapter 27. In summary, it sailed from Sidon under the island of Cyprus and stopped at a most southerly city of modern Turkey named Myra. From there, the centurion changed the prisoners onto a ship that was sailing to Italy. This particular ship carried a cargo of Egyptian grain for delivery to Rome. The ship was very old and the winds contrary, so they sailed below the island of Crete. Much time was lost by taking this course and they had to stop for supplies at a port named Fair Havens on the southern coast of the island.

It was already mid-October and already the weather conditions had become very dangerous for sailing on the Mediterranean Sea. It was 59 AD and the Feast of Atonement had been remembered during the first week of October. Paul was an experienced traveller and he spoke to the ship owner and skipper about not going any further until winter was over.

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Because the harbour of Fair Havens was small and unsuitable for spending the winter there, the ship owner and skipper decided to sail onto Phoenix, a larger harbour lying further west along the southern coast of Crete. Once the decision to go ahead was made and they left port, they found themselves in difficult wind conditions while storm clouds gathered overhead.

Do you find it difficult to make decisions? Some decisions are no more than a preference of whether to do a certain thing now or later. However, there are tried and true ways of making good major decisions. We need to be careful and prayerful when making decisions. Decisions have consequences that can lead to many regrets! If unsure, ask God to give you wisdom, as instructed in James, Chapter 1: "If any of you lack wisdom, you should pray to God, who will give it to you, because God gives generously and graciously to all."

Sometimes all it takes is for us to be patient and take the time to assess the pros and cons of the various options we know. This process of decision-making is called the 'sound-mind principle'. You mustn't be afraid to use your own mind. After all it says in 2 Timothy, Chapter 1, that God hasn't given Christians a spirit of fear but of power, love and a sound mind.

If we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, cannot we also assume that God is able to help us think and come to a safe and right decision? We can pray to God that He will open and close doors for us so that we won't miss His plan for our lives. He is well able to rearrange people and circumstances to do this for us. There's no reason to be fearful when making decisions if you're secure in the knowledge that God has your best interest in mind.

Spend time in the Scriptures. Many people seem to have a fairly low level of knowledge of the Scriptures. Instead, saturate your mind as much as possible with God's Word. Read it. Study it. Memorise it. Learn it. Remember that without faith, it is impossible to please God. And faith grows as we know we can rely on God's truths found in His Word. Once you have spent time seeking God's wisdom from His Holy Spirit and learning His truths from His Word, you will be amazed at how much better you are at making good, solid decisions in life.

Ask yourself if the decision involves a moral or a non-moral area. It's actually a little easier to discern the will of God in moral areas, because most of the time, you will find clear direction in God's Word. If God has already revealed His will in Scripture, your only response is then to obey in an appropriate way. Non-moral areas, however, still require the application of Biblical principles, although the direction may be harder to distinguish. If something clearly violates the revealed will of God in his Word, then you have your decision already made. Be ready to accept and obey God's answer. It's unlikely that God will reveal His plan to you if He already knows that you won't obey.

There's much more to this life than just earning a bigger salary or improving your status among peers, or gaining more goods than you need. When you make choices, make sure you consider how this decision will affect your spiritual development. Will this draw you nearer to God or further from him? Will it support others in some good way that develops their spiritual growth? Will it interfere with your ability to attend church, maintain godly relationships or spend time cultivating your spiritual disciplines? If the decision will harm you spiritually, then it isn't in your best interests to make that choice. Be careful not to make decisions that'll cause your family to pay a big price.

Sometimes a person can put off making a decision for so long that the time for decision making has past and a no-decision is the decision. This 'doing nothing' approach should also be backed up by prayer, for if the Lord wants a decision to move forward, the Holy Spirit will prompt the person to pass through their 'reluctance' stage and take action.

Some of the decisions we made before we became a Christian may actually be wrong when we think about them later. If you dropped out of higher education before finishing your studies, you can always go back. It might not be as easy to fit into your life but your goal is to finish what you started if you can. In 1 John, Chapter 1, we find that when we confess our sins and repent of them, which means making a complete 180-degree U-turn away from doing the same thing again, God is faithful and just. He will forgive us and cleanse us, so we can start over again with a new and right heart before Him. God desires us to make right choices always.

Well, Paul was a prisoner on an old ship going to Rome. He made a wise decision about speaking up and advising those in charge of the ship not to travel further before winter. However, for other reasons, they ruled against Paul's decision and they set off for a large winter port named Phoenix about 40 miles away. But they never reached it.

This highlights another aspect of decision making. How do the decisions of others affect us and our way of life? The Roman Emperor Severus ruled the Roman Empire from 193 AD to 211 AD from Rome. He was the first of the soldier emperors. He came to power by killing off all his rivals who had a better claim to the throne.

Years earlier, a young man from a wealthy family had travelled from a village 20 miles outside London to Rome with his father. Many of the people living in those times worshipped the pagan Roman gods. Upon his return, Alban, for that's what his name was, grew up and became well respected in his village for being helpful and kind. People who were in trouble could go to him for help, even Christians.

Emperor Severus made a decision that was to affect all Christians in Britain and Rome. They were to be killed if they would not give up their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Groups of soldiers roamed the British countryside looking for known Christians. One day, an elderly man came to Alban's house for help, saying he was about to be arrested and killed.

Alban questioned him about what he'd done wrong. The old man explained that the soldiers were just following the orders of Emperor Severus which were that all Christians should die. He said that he hadn't broken any Roman laws. His crime was that he was a Christian. Alban sheltered him because Alban had heard a great deal about Christians but nothing bad. For a while, the old man was safe in Alban's house because the soldiers didn't think to search a heathen's home to find a runaway Christian.

Every day that the old man lived with Alban, he told Alban about the Lord Jesus. Alban knew nothing about Jesus at first but the old man told him of the miracles Jesus did and eventually, His crucifixion and death. Then Jesus rose from the grave and His body couldn't be found anywhere. "Did the Romans eventually find the body?" "No, there was no body because Jesus' spirit had returned to His body. He was no longer dead but gloriously alive, and He still is!"

One day the soldiers came to Alban's house to take the old man away. Alban thought he might be able to save him. They exchanged robes and the old man was given a purse of money and Alban's servant was to take him through the back roads to safety. Alban asked the old man to pray to God to bless him and the old man was happy to do so before he disappeared out the back door.

Alban wrapped the old man's robe around him, pulled up the hood over his head and he waited. The soldiers rushed into the room, saw a man dressed in the old Christian's clothes and bound his arms. It never occurred to them to look under the hood to check who was there. They bundled Alban out of the house and marched him along the roads of the village. There seemed to be an air of excitement among the soldiers as catching and killing a Christian certainly couldn't do their chances of promotion any harm!

When the prisoner was taken before the Roman governor of the village, his wrists were freed and he pulled the hood off his head. The governor immediately declared that Alban wasn't the Christian they were looking for. These soldiers were to be punished. Then he turned his rage on Alban. "How dare you help a Christian escape! You know the emperor's orders as well as I do. The Christian rebels have to be hunted out and killed if they don't give up their new beliefs."

"Tell me where the old man is hiding," demanded the governor. "Then sacrifice to the gods and show them how sorry you are for what you've done." Alban said he could not do either thing. "I no longer believe in these Roman gods. They teach people to be cruel and wicked. The old Christian is good and gentle. I would rather believe in his God because He teaches that we are to love one another." So the governor condemned Alban to die.

Alban had only been a Christian since his discussions with the old Christian man. He was taken out to a hillside to be put to death. Alban was given every opportunity to deny his faith in Jesus but he did nothing of the sort. Just before Alban died, a remarkable thing happened. The soldier whose job it was to behead him wouldn't do it because he said Alban was a good man. "I would rather die than kill him," the soldier bravely told his captain. And so the captain beheaded them both.

Alban was the first Christian to die in Britain because he wouldn't deny his faith in Jesus Christ. Many years after Alban lived and died, his home town changed its name to St. Albans and that's what it's still known as today.

Many rulers around the world since Emperor Severus have enforced the same thing. So many Christians have been martyred for their faith in the Lord Jesus, not because they had done anything wrong but for their belief in Jesus Christ. Satan still wars against believers in the Lord Jesus and will do so until he's defeated by Jesus Himself in the end times. What comfort can we take from these senseless martyrdoms that we hear or maybe even know about? Each one who has passed out of this life is now safe in the arms of Jesus. God's kingdom will always be theirs.

The drama is from The Bible In Living Sound.

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