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BIBLE ADVENTURES SCRIPT:

A2103 ~ In Antioch of Pisidia.

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

In today's *Bible Adventure*, the Apostle Paul gives a history lesson on the foundations of the nation of Israel. It is helpful for us to take a look at this history behind the current nations of the world, and come to a point of understanding that those who don't know history are destined to repeat it.

One of the most significant problems experienced by people from all generations is their desire to dominate others. They either covet someone else's possessions and so try to gain them by killing the rightful owners, or they insist that their religious beliefs are the correct ones and cause death to dissenters. These things are the heart of the spiritual battle between God and Satan and their followers.

Somewhere around the world, there are wars in progress and needless destruction occurring as one group of people push its idea of self-superiority over other groups. For such people, peace is such a temporary thing at best and daily suffering is part of life.

Hope in God may be the only answer to the despair brought about by such conflicts. The rise of Christianity had a moderating effect on many forms of superiority behaviour. Although the Christian Church went through an historical period of serving the state, it claimed to stand above all states, as morality should stand above power.

With history as our guide, democracy has done less harm and more good than any other form of government. Within the democratic way, there is a vital truth: though people cannot be born equal, their access to education, Jesus Christ and opportunity can bring them closer to being equal.

A number of secular religions have arisen in the last five centuries and they're a sign of Christianity's declining influence. But history teaches that religion has many lives and a habit of resurrection. When laws and morals are weak, religion bears society's burden of providing guidance. But when the government of the day advances its power, paganism prospers and Christianity is weakened.

The average age of the world's greatest civilizations from the beginning of history has been about 200 years. During those 200 years, these nations have always progressed through the following pattern:

From slavery or bondage to spiritual faith → from spiritual faith to great courage → then courage to liberty → liberty to abundance → abundance to selfishness → selfishness to complacency → complacency to apathy → apathy to dependence → dependence back into slavery or bondage again.

Although Israel was chosen by God to be His special representative in the world, this nation also went through many historical cycles of sin and displeasing God. This sermon in Acts, Chapter 13, by Paul is his longest recorded sermon and was delivered in Pisidia Antioch in AD 47 or AD 48.

From this time on, whenever Luke wrote about Saul, he used his Roman name 'Paul'. Paul became the leader of a little group so Luke no longer wrote 'Barnabas and Saul' but 'Paul and Barnabas'. Barnabas who was a man full of grace, didn't show any problem with the change of leadership in the group. Together with John Mark, a cousin of Barnabas', the three men next sailed to Perga, a city in the southern part of modern-day Turkey.

After arriving there, Mark left Paul and Barnabas and returned to Jerusalem. Luke the writer didn't say why Mark left at that point, but whatever the reason was, Paul wasn't happy about it. Let us not pass judgment on what we think might have happened at the time. Paul and Barnabas then travelled inland and northward to another city called Antioch, in the district of Pisidia. Luke referred to this city as Pisidian Antioch to distinguish it from Antioch in Syria, the place where the two men had set out from.

A number of the chief cities through the Roman Empire had the status of Roman colonies. These city colonies were important political and commercial centres and strategic locations for Paul to preach the Gospel of Christ, so Christianity could spread quickly through the Empire.

Whenever Paul and Barnabas arrived at a new city, it was their custom to visit the local synagogue for the Saturday service. Such services began with the reading aloud of a passage from the Law or the first 5 books of the Old Testament. This was followed by another passage from the Prophets. Then someone would get up and give a sermon. On this first day in Pisidian Antioch Paul and Barnabas were invited by the synagogue rulers to speak.

Together with the reading and hearing of God's Word, it's also necessary that someone clearly explain its meaning. Paul was always ready and eager to do this. In each synagogue congregation, there was a group of people who had been born Jews and another group of people who had been born Gentiles yet followed Judaism, the Jewish religion. In every place Paul went, it was mainly these Gentiles who accepted his message and believed in Christ. And it was the true Jews who repeatedly rejected Paul's message and turned against him.

Paul began his sermon by giving a short summary of Jewish history. In the beginning God, by His grace, chose Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to be the fathers and leaders of His special nation Israel. By His power, God miraculously brought the Jews out of slavery in Egypt. But not long into their escape into the desert, these same Jews began to grumble and complain against Him. And worse still, they made idols to worship instead of God Himself. God thus punished that generation of Jews but to the next, He showed mercy. God then led them into the promised land of Canaan and gave it to them as their inheritance.

At first, the rulers of Israel were called 'judges' but eventually, the people asked God for a king to lead them into battle the same way that the other nations did. God was displeased with this request but appointed Saul to be their first king. As God predicted, Saul turned away from God and created burdens for the people of Israel. After Saul was killed in battle, God made David the new king. God said in advance that this new king David would be a man after His own heart and he would do what He wanted him to do.

God made a big promise to David: one of his descendants would be given a throne that would last forever. Yet the kingdom of David was split in two after the death of his son Solomon. After many generations of kings, most of whom were faithless to God, both split sections were conquered by other countries and the Jews sent into exile.

God had prophesied through the prophet Ezekiel, in Chapter 21 of his book: “Overthrown, overthrown, I will make it [that is Israel] overthrown! It shall be no longer, until He comes whose right it is, And I will give it to Him.” The One to whom David’s kingdom rightfully belongs is Jesus Christ Himself.

The prophet Jeremiah, in Chapter 23 of his book, prophesied about the coming of a righteous branch of David who would save Israel. Christ was that righteous Saviour whom God had promised to send. He was the Messiah that all Jews had been hoping for and waiting for. And this was Paul’s good news for the Jews gathered in that synagogue in Pisidian Antioch. They should have received such news with joy; however, they didn’t.

Paul kept both the Jews and Gentiles in mind as he spoke in the synagogue. He spoke of John the Baptist coming to prepare the people of Israel to repent and to accept Christ. John himself wasn’t the Christ and as Jesus became more prominent John’s ministry receded.

At this point in his sermon, Paul calls the Jews ‘children of Abraham’ and those Gentiles who were present as ‘God-fearing.’ Paul’s message of salvation was for both Jews and Gentiles equally. But the Jews in Jerusalem didn’t recognise the Saviour when He finally came to them. Instead they killed Him. By killing Him, the Jews were in fact fulfilling the prophecies that had been written in their own Scriptures and heard and read about in the synagogues each Sabbath Saturday.

After Jesus’ lifeless body was taken down from the cross by two of the Jewish leaders, it was placed in a tomb owned by one of them. The body stayed there for three days before God raised it from the dead. This is the proof of God’s victory over death. Without Jesus’ resurrection, there is no Gospel. Paul said in his first letter to the Corinthians, Chapter 15: “If our hope in Christ is good for this life only and no more, than we deserve more pity than anyone else in all the world. But the truth is that Christ has been raised from death, as the guarantee that those who sleep in death will also be raised.”

Jesus had been seen by many witnesses during the days following His restoration to life again. What God promised, He fulfilled in Jesus. And not only this, God gave Jesus a body that would never decay but would last for ever and also a kingdom without an end. These things weren't promised to David, who served as king over his own generation and then his dead body decayed back to dust in his tomb.

Paul told all those present in the synagogue: "All of you are to know for sure that it is through Jesus that the message about forgiveness of sin is preached to you. You are to know that everyone who believes in Him is set free from all the sins from which the Law of Moses could not set you free."

The Law of Moses, which is also known as the 'Jewish law', only provided forgiveness for those sins done in ignorance. There was no forgiveness for any sins committed knowingly, because the Jewish law couldn't purify anyone's heart or conscience. But through faith in Christ, any person whether Jew or Gentile, can receive Christ's righteousness and through this, become righteous in God's eyes. All of our sins, whether done knowingly or unknowingly, are wiped out and gone. Just like Paul and Barnabas, what good news we Christians have to share!

Paul then issued a warning from an Old Testament prophet called Habakkuk. Habakkuk had warned the Jews that if they didn't obey God, God would destroy them. God said that He was going to do something in their days that they would never believe. God was going to give them a great punishment but they took no notice of the warning. While they scoffed, an enemy nation overcame them and so they perished.

Paul wanted the people in the synagogue to realise that Jesus Christ was the great 'work' God had promised and that they shouldn't reject Him at any cost. Otherwise a fate worse than what happened to Habakkuk's listeners would also befall them.

How about you? Have you hesitated to seek forgiveness in Christ or to live wholeheartedly for Him? Or have you put off a decision to follow Him until later in life? We can't count on having any tomorrows, because today may be the last day of our lives. If you read the newspaper or hear the news, you will know that a number of young people die in accidents early in life. Only God knows the length of our days. He loves us so very much – we mustn't decline His invitation to belong to Him. For today could be our very last.

The Lord Jesus Himself said in Revelation, Chapter 3, Verse 20: “Behold I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come into him and eat with him, and he with me.”

The drama is from The Bible In Living Sound.

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