



## BIBLE RADIO PRODUCTIONS

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BIBLE ADVENTURES SCRIPT:

**A2132 ~ A Report from the Gentiles.**

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

As the Apostle Paul walked along the road from Caesarea to Jerusalem, he was completing his 3<sup>rd</sup> missionary journey. It had taken him 5 years, from 52 AD to 57 AD, to cover 2,700 miles throughout Turkey, Greece and Lebanon. In the final stages of this trip, many believers in Christ had warned Paul of hardships ahead.

If Paul had thought back over his life on the road and in sailing ships, he would have remembered the beatings, the riots and the troubles caused time and time again by opposing Jews. He'd learnt much from the suffering he had gone through. He warned Timothy in his 2<sup>nd</sup> letter to him that: "All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution." He told Timothy that God had delivered him out of all his difficulties. But now the question remained: what about his future? A prophet had also predicted that Paul would be imprisoned in Jerusalem and then handed over to the Gentiles.

How should we cope when a time of suffering comes to us? If we do anything to advance the kingdom of Jesus Christ, we can expect to suffer in some way. If we don't want to be criticized, then we don't do anything. But when we meet our Master in heaven, then He will not be pleased with our lack of service in the power of Christ's Name. We and others, and especially God, will lose out. We have to be careful not to reject truthful and constructive criticism that will help us to grow. This requires a great deal of humility, because accepting criticism is a hard thing to do. Sometimes it's painful to hear the truth but it's even worse to continue in harmful behaviour or attitudes. When people unjustly find fault with us, the Bible says we are to respond gently in truth and not demand justice – the Lord sees and knows and will right the wrong in due course.

Suffering can bring great renewal and healing if it drives us closer to God in dependency, thankfulness and prayer. What more could future suffering do for Paul? He'd been through a lot already and had achieved his goal of being in Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost. On the first day of the feast, Paul and his team were in Jerusalem and the believers there welcomed them very gladly. The Christians there were very grateful for the collection of money presented to them from the Gentile churches. But things proved quite different on the 2<sup>nd</sup> day.

The elders and leader of the Jerusalem church, including James, the brother of Jesus, were all present and Paul addressed them, giving an account of the work that he'd done among the Gentiles. He told of the great number of Gentiles coming to Christ and the many churches established in Asia and Greece.

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Most of the Christians in the Jerusalem church were Jewish and had followed the Law of Moses most of their lives. They hadn't given up following the Law after becoming Christians. These people had heard rumours that Paul had been teaching Jewish converts that they should no longer follow the Law of Moses. In their eyes, it was alright to teach such things to Gentile Christians but not to Jewish Christians. They believed that Paul was committing a grave offense against the Jewish Christians.

When the Jerusalem Council met, as listed in Acts, Chapter 15, there were two questions needing to be resolved for the new Gentile Christians: do Gentiles first have to become Jews before they can become Christians? And do Gentiles have to observe the Law of Moses after they become Christians? Some Jewish Christians were teaching that Gentiles had to observe the Law of Moses and Jewish customs to be saved. Clearly, this teaching contradicted the fact that salvation was by grace alone, through faith alone, and in Christ alone for both Jews and Gentiles.

The Jerusalem Council then proceeded to give four rules that Gentile Christians should live by. These were not rules the Gentiles must follow to be saved. Rather, the rules were to build harmony between Jewish and Gentile Christians in the first century. The four rules the Jerusalem Council decided on were that Gentile Christians should abstain from: any food polluted by idols, sexual immorality, the meat of strangled animals and blood. The instructions were not intended to guarantee salvation, but to promote peace within the early church.

From time to time in their history, Jews made a special vow to God. After such a vow was made, the person making the vow was not allowed to cut his hair until the period of the vow had ended. Then on the last day of the vow, the person was to cut his hair and offer the hair to God along with other sacrifices, as listed in Numbers, Chapter 6. The Jerusalem church elders wanted Paul to join with four other men in purification ceremonies and pay for their offerings and haircuts. This would show that Paul kept the Jewish law.

Did Paul need to go through purification ceremonies? No he didn't, and some Gentile Christians might well have criticised Paul for acting one way with Jewish Christians and then another with Gentiles. But Paul agreed to the plan because he had one all important purpose in life: he wanted to see both Jews and Gentiles won to Christ by whatever means he could.

When the 7 days of purification had almost ended, Paul was in the temple when he was recognised by some of the Jews from Ephesus who were visiting Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost. They'd fiercely opposed Paul in Ephesus and immediately caused a riot in the temple. They claimed that Paul had defiled the temple by bringing a Gentile believer from Ephesus into the temple's inner courtyard. They'd seen Paul with a group of Gentiles a few days earlier, as recorded in Acts, Chapter 20. They assumed that Paul had taken one of those men into the temple with him.

The rules of the temple were that any Gentile passing into the inner courtyard of the temple was immediately sentenced to death. The Jews believed that the temple would be defiled if a Gentile entered it. Paul's enemies brought false charges against him and this placed his name, reputation and even his life, in danger. This is a reminder to us that false charges can cause great destructive damage in a church.

Just as the Ephesians had caused a riot when they thought their temple of Diana was being dishonoured, so the Jews in Jerusalem also caused a riot against Paul for the same reason. Paul was seized by the Jews and dragged out of the inner courtyard. Then the temple officials closed the gate lest in commotion the temple should somehow be defiled. Then the Jewish crowd tried to kill Paul.

Just near the outer courtyard of the temple was a stairway connected to a Roman fort. As soon as the soldiers inside the fort heard the uproar, they were quickly able to grab Paul and save his life. The Roman commander supposed that Paul had committed some great crime and he ordered that Paul be put in chains. But when the commander tried to find out what Paul had done, he couldn't get a clear picture. Some people said one thing while others gave different stories.

As the soldiers were taking Paul toward the stairs leading up to the fort, the crowd renewed their efforts to seize him. They cried, "Away with him!" They wanted him killed. Only 27 years earlier, another Jewish crowd in that same city had shouted the very same thing for another political prisoner – named Jesus.

The commander mistakenly thought that Paul was an Egyptian who three years earlier had led a revolt against the Romans. When the Roman army attacked the Egyptian and his 4,000 Jewish followers, the Egyptian had escaped but most of his men had been slaughtered by the Romans. The surviving Jews were very angry with the Egyptian for running away and leaving them at the mercy of the Romans. The commander thought that it was for this reason that the crowd was trying so hard to kill Paul.

As Paul was about to be led into the barracks, he spoke to the commander in Greek. Paul denied that he was the Egyptian and said he was a Jew. He asked for permission to speak to the crowd and when this was granted, Paul stood on the stairs and motioned with his hand for quiet. A great silence came over the people. He spoke to the people in their own Aramaic, or Hebrew, language. Because Paul's travelling companions were Greek, the crowd expected him to speak to them in Greek. But when Paul spoke to them in their own language, they listened more intently.

This use of a person's heart language has been one of the most motivating reasons Bibles are translated into many new languages so that readers can gain a much greater understanding from what they read. The first translations of the Bible were copied into Latin in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century after a request by the Italian pope of that day. As time went by, although there were revisions to the Bible, only people with a good education could read it at that time.

In 1330, John Wycliffe was born on a sheep farm 200 miles from London. He became the leading English theologian of his time. Wycliffe believed that every Christian should have access to the Scriptures in his own language and so he began with a good friend to translate the Bible into English from the Latin. But this action was greatly opposed by the church authorities. Wycliffe said that Englishmen learn Christ's law best in English. Just as Moses had heard God's law in his own tongue and so had Christ's apostles.

Wycliffe also opposed some the official church teaching. Instead, he promoted this statement, "Trust wholly in Christ, rely completely on His sufferings; beware of seeking to be justified in any other way than His righteousness." Wycliffe died before the Bible translation was finished and before the church authorities could ever convict him of heresy.

Though Wycliffe's followers were driven underground, they finished the translation we now know today as the 'Wycliffe' Bible. Wycliffe's followers remained a persistent irritation to the English church authorities until the English Reformation, which started early in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century and made Wycliffe's views acceptable everywhere.

John Wycliffe made quite an impression on the church: 43 years after his death, officials dug up his body, burned his remains and then threw the ashes into a river. But they still couldn't get rid of him! His teachings, although suppressed, continued to be spread.

In Psalm 119, Verse 11, it says to learn the Scriptures: "Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You (Lord)." Let us do so and remember it in our times of good and of suffering for our Lord.

*The drama is from The Bible In Living Sound.*

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