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BIBLE ADVENTURES SCRIPT:

A2153 ~ Paul's Trial before Nero.

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

The history of some Caesars ruling from Rome over the world empire makes for very complicated reading. Court life was continually a power struggle, with murders, poisonings and banishments rife within the elite. Emperor Claudius had ruled from 41 AD to 54 AD when he died of suspected poisoning by his wife. She had a son by a previous marriage and had persuaded Claudius to adopt him as his son only 4 years before Claudius' untimely death. This put the adopted son, Nero, ahead of Claudius' own younger son as the next in line for the throne.

Nero wasn't quite 17 years old at the time of Claudius's death, so his mother became regent for a while. She was a unique woman in Roman history as the sister of one emperor, the wife of the next emperor and the mother of the one after that. However, Nero didn't let her remain in charge for long and soon sent her away from the palace to live elsewhere to reduce her interference.

Nero had two advisors who kept him busy with sensible legislation and for a time, the empire enjoyed sound government. Nero followed the steps of Claudius in applying himself carefully to his judicial duties. He also considered liberal ideas, such as ending the killing of gladiators and condemned criminals in public spectacles.

And it was before Nero that the Apostle Paul's appeal case against Jewish claims that he caused a riot was to be presented.

DRAMA - [The Bible In Living Sound](#).

Paul was freed by Nero in AD 62 and able to travel again. It's thought that he again visited Macedonia in northern Greece, and the cities of Troas and Miletus in present-day Turkey, as recorded in his letters to Timothy. Paul wrote in his letter to Titus of visits to Crete and a city on the western shore of Greece. While Paul was out of the way of Jewish enemies, though, things didn't keep going so well in Rome.

At first Nero had come across as a very humane ruler. But when a city official was murdered by one of his slaves, Nero was so intensely upset that he was forced by law to have all four hundred slaves of the slain man's household put to death. It was no doubt such decisions that weakened Nero's interest in administrative duties and caused him to withdraw more and more, devoting himself to such interests as horse-racing, music and singing.

Nero abandoned his wife for a mistress and his mother sympathised with the wife. Nero was enraged by the gossip his mother was spreading about him and made quite a number of attempts to kill her, even to the point of having a sinkable boat built. His mother swam ashore and only the boat sank. So Nero sent an assassin to dispatch her with a club and a sword. Nero divorced his wife and then he had her executed on trumped up charges. The scandals kept coming with wild parties, appearances on public stages for his performances, and the murder of his next wife too.

Yet the Roman Senate kept the empire enjoying moderate and responsible government through the administration. The Senate wasn't yet ready to overcome its fear of Nero and move against him as he continued to show certain signs of madness.

Then in 64 AD, disaster struck. The Great Fire of Rome burnt for six days and completely destroyed 10 of the 14 districts. People who lost everything in the fire were suspicious that Nero hadn't done enough to stop the fire. One historian claimed that Nero had done all he could and that he had large residential areas of Rome rebuilt at his own expense. But he also claimed for himself a huge piece of land to build a massive palace with gardens and an artificial lake. Without the fire, Nero could never do this and that further aroused people's suspicions against him all over again.

Always wanting to be popular, Nero looked for someone else to blame for starting the fire. He decided to blame the new religious group called the Christians. So many Christians were subsequently arrested and thrown to wild beasts or crucified. This brutal persecution led the Christians to name Nero as the first Antichrist.

A plot against Nero's life was found out and many people were executed without a trial. Nero escaped to Greece to show off his artistic talents. But the situation in Rome deteriorated further, with food shortages, many more executions and still Nero hadn't returned from his trip. When he was summoned by the senate to return in 68 AD, he came but by then, it was too late. Nothing was actually done to control the crisis and so various armies withdrew their allegiance from Nero. The senate condemned the emperor to be flogged to death but when Nero heard of it, he committed suicide during 68 AD. This was the same year that Paul was again a prisoner in Rome and this time, he would have no further freedom.

Are there lessons we can learn from Nero's life? One of the life goals of many people is to so live that they maximise pleasure and minimise pain. Because of the effect of Adam and Eve's sin on the human mind, everyone arrives in this world with the foolish idea that the route to happiness is to have their own way in everything. This desire to have one's own way needs to be curbed and that's a foundational purpose of parental discipline. Such discipline should drive out foolishness and build wisdom for maturity.

Nero started out trying to do the right thing in his court of justice. What went wrong? There is an old saying: “Power gradually but completely destroys from the human mind every humane and gentle virtue.” Nero had the power to change the law so that he didn’t have to order the death of 400 innocent slaves after their master’s murder. A famous ruler once said: “If you want to test a man’s character, give him power.” Power is never good, unless the one who has it is good.

What does this teach us to do with our leaders, political and spiritual? In 1st Timothy, Chapter 2, Paul wrote: “I urge that petitions, prayers, requests, and thanksgiving be offered to God for all people; for kings and all others, who are in authority, that we may live a quiet and peaceful life with all reverence toward God and with proper conduct.” Some Christians seem to neglect this aspect of prayer, even in public prayers. It’s often been said: “We get the government we deserve.” Faithful prayer for people’s representatives in government, and the legislation being brought forward for discussion and a vote, have sometimes brought unexpected results.

In one country, the Christians prayed against a bill before parliament that didn’t honour God. In the final casting vote, one small radical party voted against it, saying it didn’t go far enough, thereby causing the bill to fail. Always praise and thank the Lord for such successes!

The due process of someone being tried for alleged crimes had completely broken down in Rome. Anyone the officials didn’t like could be executed without trial or even a good reason. This wasn’t the way the Roman Empire operated when Nero first came to the throne. We have to ask ourselves: Are we leaving our place of influence in the world better than when we started out? In Proverbs, Chapter 18, it says: “He who is slothful (or lazy) in his work is a brother to him who is a great destroyer.” Nero had destroyed the justice system upon which the Roman Empire was built and so it was only a matter of time before he himself would be destroyed.

Nero wanted to be popular with the people. And many people want to be popular too, even to sacrifice many things so that they can have the right fashion look to be popular with the ‘in’ crowd. In the United States, many teenage girls go to tanning parlours where they can get a suntan – even if it’s snowing outside! They pay to get a tan even though they know that this type of tanning could cause them skin cancer or age their skin and appearance in future years. Is being popular that important? To some, it can be.

Popularity means much to those with a competitive desire to climb the ladder of success and make a name for themselves. There are different types of popularity: some people want to be friendly with everyone; some can crack a joke and make everyone smile. Others, however, like to think they are popular because they have a bigger house and more wealth than most other people. For these people, being popular makes them feel more important and motivated to achieve things in life.

But there are negatives to watch out for with popularity too. A popular person may gain their attention through unkind and unwanted comments against someone else who can’t fight back. A young person cannot respond to the boss’s barbs. While such a person may feel that it’s their popularity that’s causing people to respond to them, it could well be from their position of power, fear or avoidance of possible negative consequences that people are really doing their bidding.

Once when Nero was competing in a chariot race, he fell out of his chariot. None of the other competitors were prepared to drive past him and win the race. Such preferential treatment means that the favoured person gains a false sense of his own abilities. Even when Nero was dying of suicide at the age of 31, he said: “What an artist the world loses in me.”

Rather than trying to develop an image of popularity, it's far better to develop real friends who love and respect you and will stand by you when hard times come. Real popularity, if there is such a thing, involves being kind to people when they're with you. Notice what they do and say, and encourage them to treat others fairly.

What does God say about popularity? In the Old Testament, one of the most unpopular prophets of the Lord was Jeremiah. For 23 years during the reign of Judea's last 4 kings, Jeremiah brought God's words of judgment against the rulers and warnings of destruction by the Babylonians. Jeremiah was persecuted for what he said, yet he couldn't stop saying the words of God. Jeremiah wished that God would defend him in more obvious ways.

Often when there was a long-term prediction by a prophet, there was also a short-term one fulfilled within a couple of years. This warned the people that what the prophet had said would come true. But this pattern never happened with Jeremiah. Yet he was far more passionate about God's glory and truth than he was concerned for his own popularity or comfort.

That is how it should be for every Christian. We should be so passionate about the gospel that there's nothing more important than sharing it with others. Even if people misunderstand us or criticise us, or make fun of us and even if they refuse to believe, we have no option but to tell them anyway.

When God calls us to follow Him and serve Him, He doesn't promise us an easy life, with health, wealth and popularity. No, at times it's a lonely and difficult road – as Jeremiah discovered. But over time, we too will discover that the joy and blessing of serving God far outweighs any trial, ridicule or even persecution we might have to face for following Jesus. Even death cannot separate us from His love. We can trust Him and His Word 100%.

The drama is from The Bible In Living Sound.

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