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BIBLE ADVENTURES SCRIPT:

A1578 ~ Cyrus Decrees Israel's Return.

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

A world-famous missionary in the early 1800s worked in India by translating Bible sections into many languages and dialects.

By the time, the missionary had been working and printing Scriptures in local languages for 19 years, he had a major setback. While he was away teaching in a school one day, the printing room where all the copies were made was destroyed by a fire. Not only completed Bible translations were gone but also a large amount of printing paper. The man was stunned but took little time to mourn. He determined that he would redo all the translation work again.

When news of the fire reached England, the missionary became well known. A lot of money was raised to help rebuild and enlarge his printing shop for his work of redoing the translations. He once said: "There are grave difficulties on every hand and more are looming ahead. Therefore we must go forward."

The prophet Daniel had prepared the Jewish people who were living in exile in Babylon to return to their own land and rebuild their city Jerusalem. He made it known that God's plan for them was to go back. Just the task of moving all the freed Jewish slaves back to Jerusalem to build God a new Temple needed much planning. It would be hard work starting all over again. With so many buildings destroyed by fire in Jerusalem 70 years before, the place would also show great neglect.

Zerubbabel was a descendant of the Jewish kings of old and heir to the throne of Judah. He was given the responsibility of organising the first group of about 50,000 people to return to Judah. These people were to rebuild the Temple and set up their homes again.

It would be no easy task. The trip back to Jerusalem required more faith in God than what the Israelite people needed to live where they were. Their time of slavery under the Babylonians was mild compared to the harshness that their ancestors had experienced during their earlier time in Egypt.

Just as Abraham had travelled along the Euphrates River and then moved southward towards Jerusalem, so did the first group of returning exiles follow the same route.

The Old Testament book of Ezra begins from the time of the decree by King Cyrus and links back to the last two verses in the book of 2nd Chronicles. The returning exiles under Zerubbabel came to Jerusalem in 538 BC.

It wasn't until 80 years later that Ezra the scribe led a second group of people back to Jerusalem. Almost a further 20 years passed after that before Nehemiah came to Jerusalem to serve as its governor.

What did the declaration that the Jewish people were freed from slavery mean to them? For some, there were shouts of joy but for others who had been born in Babylon, they didn't think much would change in their lives. As slaves they seemed to do very well and were comfortable. They had no desire to return to the hardships of clearing land and building again. God's wishes didn't mean much to them.

For many exiles, they chose the soft option of staying where they were.

We all like to be comfortable and choose the soft options where possible. If we have a cranky neighbour, we want to move house. If there is a difficult person at work, we want to try to avoid them. A preacher once said: "If God brings a person across your path of life, take it that God intended you to meet. Pray for that person and act kindly towards them."

A Christian woman whose husband did Gospel preaching tours in other countries, stayed at home and reared their children. When the children were grown up, her husband wanted her to move house to another English-speaking country half-way around the world. In her prayers, she told the Lord, "I don't want to go." But she did and helped her husband in the work of spreading the Good News of our Saviour.

A young man asked the Lord Jesus what good thing must he do to receive eternal life. In Matthew, Chapter 19, the Lord Jesus replied that if the man wanted to have spiritual maturity which accompanies self-sacrificing character, he must go and sell everything he had and give it to the poor. Then he would have riches in heaven and become a disciple of the Lord Jesus. The young man was very rich in worldly goods and sadly, he didn't want to give them up. A life of hardship to him didn't appeal at all.

On the matter of change, we don't like it and particularly more so as we grow older. But one writer says: "Welcome change as a friend. Try to visualize new possibilities and the blessings they are bound to bring you. Never stop learning and never stop growing; that's the key to a rich and fascinating life."

We can't live our lives by always looking back. We must work towards the future. Just as the Jews couldn't change their past, neither can we change ours! But the lessons of the past can change us for better or worse.

It all depends on how we look at our lives. The past can become a rudder that guides us or an anchor that hinders us. Leave your past mistakes with God and look to the future by faith in Him.

For all who claim the name of Christ as their Saviour, there is a task for them to do. Pray for opportunities to speak to people, your friends and family, neighbours and strangers, about their need of a Saviour from their sin. Yes, this prayer will take you out of your comfort zone and there will be some who will get offended with your message.

Pray for that special skill to turn every conversation into a focus on the Lord Jesus. One lady who developed this art of conversation was a famous hymn writer. Her entire life was characterized by spiritual saintliness. It is said that she never wrote a line of verse without first fervently praying over it and then she gave God all the credit for its composition.

An early writer said: "Dare to look up to God and say, 'Deal with me in the future as You will; I am of the same mind as You are, Lord; I am Yours; I refuse nothing that pleases You; lead me where You will; clothe me and dress me as You choose'."

Yes, being wholly committed to God will challenge us every moment of the day and night. But we must be prepared to let God change us and do His good works of eternal value in us. His ways are mysterious and unexpected at times yet God will work out something for your life that He won't in others.

Sing this song:

*'From glory to glory He's changing me, changing me, changing me,
His likeness and image to perfect in me, the love of God shown to the world.
For He's changing, changing me, from earthly things to the heavenly.
His likeness and image to perfect in me, the love of God shown to the world.'*

Lasting joy comes only from God, our heavenly Father.

The drama is from The Bible In Living Sound.

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