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THE FOURTH GENERATION CURSE

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF ACTS
NUMBER 127
ACTS 25:23

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ACTS 25:23 "And on the morrow, when Agrippa was come, and Bernice, with great pomp, and was entered into the place of hearing, with the chief captians, and principal men of the city, at Festus' commandment Paul was brought forth."

We have been studying in these last two chapters the breakdown in Jewish law. Common law in every nation is designed to protect the privacy and the rights of the individual. Every individual, just on the basis of the fact that he is an individual and a human being, has the right to his own privacy and to treatment with justice. Each individual has the right to pursue his own life in such a way that he is carried to his maximum usefulness and happiness. No one has a right to interfere with this process. Law is designed to safeguard the privileges of every man. Both Roman law and Jewish law had one thing in common--they were both objective. In their objectivity a person was always innocent until proven guilty. They did not indict a person on hearsay, only on the basis of proven facts. Evidence, based on truth, was absolutely necessary if one was tried and found guilty.

Now in this incident of Paul's trial before Felix and Festus, we notice that Jewish law had broken down at this very point, and the Jewish people had allowed their system to be infiltrated by religion. This brought subjectivity to their souls. Paul had been caught in this trap by a decaying Jewish system, and even though no facts had been presented in court that would prove Paul was guilty, they still wanted to execute him on the basis of their prejudice and hatred. The Jewish leaders had allowed Satanic darkness to enter their souls and they had become self-righteous and their thoughts were dominated by pride and hatred. Because of this it was impossible for Paul to receive a fair trial before the Jews. This pseudo system of prejudice would eventually lead to the destruction of the Jewish nation in 70 A.D.

On the contrary, Roman law had maintained objectivity, and even though many of the Roman emperors and senators were weak individuals, the Roman law system was strong, and this carried the Roman Empire for several centuries. Paul realized that he could not get a fair trial under the Jewish system, so he had appealed to Caesar. Under Roman law Paul realized that he would get a fair trial. At this point, Paul should have been set free, but the judge was biased and dominated by prejudice and therefore Paul was kept in prison unjustly. As Festus came on the scene he immediately wanted to incur the favor of the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem, so he miscued on the trial. He kept Paul in bonds, even though the evidence didn't justify such action.

At this juncture Festus found himself in a very embarrassing situation. In the past, Festus had proved himself to be a very fair administrator. He had ruled quite wisely, and therefore, had gained the right to be the Procurator of Judaea. But at this point Festus had lost his objectivity and here we have found him in quite a dilemma. He could not send Paul to Rome without sending along with him some written statement of his guilt. Paul wasn't guilty of any crime, and therefore, Festus didn't have anything to write about his guilt. In this frustration he attended a ten-day party in Jerusalem and under those abnormal conditions the Jewish leaders persuaded Festus to try to bring Paul back to Jerusalem for trial. Festus is now back in Caesarea after that ten-day party in Jerusalem, and in our Scripture Agrippa and Bernice have arrived as his special guests for a few days visit. Agrippa had with him his beautiful sister Bernice with whom he was living in incest. So at the party the conversation swung around to the Apostle Paul, and Agrippa heard for the first time about this dilemma in which Festus had found himself. Festus aroused the curiosity of Agrippa and Bernice as he told them of Paul, therefore, they expressed their desire to see and hear Paul.

ACTS 25:23 "And on the morrow, when Agrippa was come, and Bernice, with great pomp, and was entered into the place of hearing, with the chief captains, and principal men of the city, at Festus' commandment Paul was brought forth." In this verse we have come to the opening of Paul's hearing before Agrippa and Bernice. Agrippa was the great grandson of Herod the Great. Along with him was Bernice, the great granddaughter of Herod the Great. Agrippa, Drusilla and Bernice were the last of the Herodian line.

These three children have been described by four Roman historians as the most attractive children in the Roman Empire. French literature picked up these stories and composed dramas about their fantastic beauty.

But Agrippa, II, and Bernice will hear the gospel preached by Paul and they will be the fourth generation in their family to hear the clear teaching of the Word of God and they will be the fourth generation to reject the gospel, and in so doing they will fulfill one of the great principles in the Word of God known as THE FOUR. GENERATION CURSE.

THE DOCTRINE OF THE FOUR GENERATION CURSE

1. EXODUS 20:4-6 "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them; for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments."

Verse 4 and the first part of verse 5 deals with religion, the religion the Jews faced as they left Egypt and went on their journey to the Promised Land. God knew that the golden calf was in their minds long before it was a reality, so God gave them some doctrine to meet that situation. Religion can affect people through four generations. It says "Visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children of the 3rd and 4th generation of them that hate me." The words "hate me" expresses negative volition. There is no such thing as a four generation curse without the volition of each generation being involved. Once a person goes over to religion his soul becomes filled with scar tissue and he moves over to an area where the sin unto death can apply. He has thereby destroyed the possibility of the inhale of Bible truth, therefore, all he can exhale is sin and human good which is always the product of the old sin nature. It took King Saul forty years to gather enough scar tissue on his soul to lead him to the sin unto death. When this kind of activity continues in people, eventually they are led to the sin unto death. As scar tissue is built up, darkness fills the soul. This brings us to the doctrine we call the four generation curse. If for four generations the people continue in unbelief, and there is no positive volition toward God, God allows the sin unto death to apply, and the individuals concerned are wiped out and their chances are gone forever. If a whole race does this, God will wipe out a whole race or a whole nation, as was illustrated by the Amorites. When Joseph went down into Egypt we read, "The iniquity of the Amorites was not yet full." But four generations later, the iniquity of the Amorites was full, and in the time of Joshua, they were wiped out. The principle is this-- for four generations they had been negative, and all God could do was to wipe them out. They had simply come to the end of the line. Please notice those last four words of verse five--"Of them that hate me." This is an expression of negative volition.

2. After God removes a people under the four generation curse, those who go on positive volition will be the recipients of the grace of God. If you had a thousand generations and they went on positive volition, they would all be the recipients of the grace of God.
EXODUS 34:6-7 "And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation."
 The exact same principle is stated here, only the order is reversed. Here grace comes first and judgment last. "Keeping mercy for thousands" refers to thousands of generations. Here again in this passage the four generation curse is stated.

3. NUMBERS 14:18 "The Lord is longsuffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation. This is a restatement of this principle, but is given here in connection with the Kadesh-Barnea incident. Now this looks rather harsh on the surface. But remember, God is a God of grace and he cannot be unfair to any member of the human race.

4. DEUTERONOMY 24:16 "The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers: every man shall be put to death for his own sin."
 This is the principle of culpability. No children are ever cursed for their parents sins. Each one is disciplined by God for his own acts. The principle is this--each man will be punished for his own acts. The principle works in this way. When for four generations the family keeps going on negative volition, God will then remove that family from the earth by the sin unto death. We saw this principle operate at the time of the flood. Remember, God protects the human race.

5. Please remember that the curse can be broken.
JEREMIAH 31:29-30 "In those days they shall say no more, The fathers have eaten a sour grape, and the children's teeth are set on edge. But every one shall die for his own iniquity: every man that eateth the sour grape, his teeth shall be set on edge."
 "In those days" refers to the Millennium. These words in verse 29 refer to the first and second generation. Then in verse 30 we see the break. "Every one shall die for his own iniquity" and this is the law of culpability.

6. JEREMIAH 31:31-34 "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord: But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

This is a new covenant. In verse 33 you see how the four generation curse is broken. It is this way--"I will put my law in their inward parts and write it in their hearts." You break the four generation curse by writing doctrine in the minds and souls of the people. They inhale the gospel and they exhale faith toward Jesus Christ. This switches you over from the four generation curse to the thousand generation blessing. The final result is stated in verse 34.

7. DEUTERONOMY 6:6-13 "And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates. And it shall be, when the Lord thy God shall have brought thee into the land which he sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give thee great and goodly cities, which thou buildedst not, And houses full of all good things, which thou filledst not, and wells digged, which thou diggedst not, vineyards and olive trees, which thou plantedst not; when thou shalt have eaten and be full; Then beware lest thou forget the Lord, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name." Here the importance of breaking the curse of the four generation curse. The only way to break the curse of the flow of sin in the life is to take in Bible truth. This is the responsibility of the parents. The result is stated in DEUTERONOMY 6:14-15 "Ye shall not go after other gods, of the gods of the people which are round about you; (For the Lord thy God is a jealous God among you) lest the anger of the Lord thy God be kindled against thee, and destroy thee from off the face of the earth." Notice the final verdict--"Destroy thee off the face of the earth."

Now the four generation curse is the doctrine behind our story here in Acts 25. We began with a man named Herod the Great. He is the one who had the little children killed in Bethlehem. He had every opportunity to accept Christ, but he turned the opportunity down. He was a genius, the most amazing man of the Roman Empire.

He had a son named Antipas, known in history as Antipas the Fox. He had a chance to believe in Christ for he heard the gospel from John the Baptist, and he and his wife brought on the death of John the Baptist. The third generation was Herod Agrippa, I. He had every chance to be saved, and he is the one who put Peter in prison (as told in Acts 12) and he is the one who had James beheaded. The fourth generation was represented by Herod Agrippa, II, Bernice, and Drusilla. They fell by the wayside and this was the four generation curse. God wiped them out and that family ended. They all had a chance to accept Christ and they failed.

In our next study we will see how Agrippa and Bernice had a chance to hear the gospel from Paul, and they turned that chance down.