

## *Open Heart, Open Bible*

Joshua and Acts of the Apostles

Linking Theme: Fulfilment

*Passage for weekly reading (week 37):*

*Acts 25 – 28*

### Detainment in Rome

Two years have passed from the date of the trial before Felix, and the only thing to have changed is that he has been succeeded as Roman Governor by one known as Porcius Festus. The Jewish leaders are still as anxious as ever to rid the earth of Paul, and the Romans, to their credit, still want to see justice done according to their own legal system. The Apostle knows that going to Jerusalem could well be fatal for him, and appeals to the Imperial Court in Rome as the one means of outmanoeuvring his enemies. Festus has no choice but to grant his request. Before this can happen, Herod Agrippa visits Caesarea, together with his sister, Bernice, and Paul has yet another opportunity to testify, this time in the presence of the king himself.

In this session, Paul gives quite a detailed summary of his background, leading to the Damascus Road experience, and the commission he received from the Lord there and then (v.'s 17&18). He assures the king that he was not disobedient to the vision given to him, to preach the gospel to both Jew and Gentile. Both Festus and Agrippa balk at the challenge Paul's words bring to them, the Governor because of incomprehension, the king because of pride, but neither can find anything in him that substantiates the charges of his accusers.

The exciting account of the disastrous sea journey to Rome is the last of the "we" sections in the Book of Acts. Clearly, Luke has joined the motley group of prisoners about to make the passage, and time is lost shortly after leaving port because of contrary winds. Against Paul's advice, the decision is taken to leave Fair Havens, a port on the southern tip of Crete, in an attempt to winter at the more sheltered harbour to the west of the island, known as Phoenix. The "Fast" referred to in v.9 is Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, in our calendar falling between mid-September and early October. This gives us some indication as to the time of year.

The folly of this recklessness soon becomes evident, the ship being driven helplessly along by a violent tempest for "many days" (v.20). Paul again experiences a night-time angelic visitation, and is able to lift the morale of all those onboard. He has to appear before Caesar, and nothing can stop him from keeping that appointment! (23 v.11) After two weeks, the boat is driven towards

land, and, after taking some food, crew, soldiers and prisoners jump ship when she runs aground in shallow waters. Luke is still with them (v.37). Not one of them was lost, as Paul had said (v.24).

The castaways have happened upon the island of Malta. The islanders are in awe of Paul when he is not harmed by the viper which fastens on him, and a wonderful move of divine healing is released through him for the duration of their stay. The gospel must have been received by the Maltese people at this time, for Paul would have ministered healing only in the name of Jesus. Much goodwill is built up as a result, and everything needed to get to Rome is made available to the journeymen, including the final leg of the sea voyage to Puteoli in Central Italy. (The gods known as Castor and Pollux were the mythological sons of Jupiter, particularly venerated by superstitious sailors operating out of Alexandria. They were associated with light, and hence safety and direction, given the many dangers of sea travel.) From here, the men moved inland towards Rome, being met halfway at the Forum of Appius by some of the believers. Paul was obviously very glad to see them (v.15).

On arriving at the Imperial City, he is kept under guard, but is able to receive visitors, and many come. The large contingent of Jews who meet with him initially are, as ever, divided by his teaching (v.24). He gives them a strong Biblical rebuke, exactly the passage that Jesus had used to the Jews of His day (Matt.13 v.'s 14&15 quoting Is. 6 v.'s 9&10), and assures them that salvation will find a response in the hearts of many Gentiles. Another time span of two years follows, and we can safely assume that the Lord brought people of many nationalities to the Apostle's rented house as he "**preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus**". God's word is not chained! (2 Tim.2 v.9).

This is all that we are told about the ministry of Paul the Apostle from the scriptures, but we do know from secular historians that he was martyred in Rome, probably around A.D.68. His valedictory is given in 2 Tim.4 v.'s 7&8. His lifestyle has set the bar for all who would be radical as they follow Christ Jesus, and the missionary journeys have been the inspiration for those who have engaged in the propagation of the gospel down the ages of church history.

### **Food for thought / discussion / prayer**

- 1) Paul's understanding of his mission to the Gentiles is given in 26 v.18 – a good mission statement for any church. Can we pray it into being as our own mission statement?
- 2) What has challenged you most as we have read through the Books of Joshua and Acts? Have a review.