

# Daily Readings

*This week we'll be reading the concluding chapters of the Book of Acts as we follow Paul's final days. Last week, we left Paul at Jerusalem at the conclusion of the third missionary journey.*

**Monday, October 19 – Read Acts 21:17-22:29.** This section includes Paul's arrest and the grounds for charges against him. James, the brother of Jesus, is still the leader of the Jerusalem church. By this time, thousands of Jews had become followers of Jesus. The Jerusalem church leaders were worried about the rumors that Paul was teaching the Gentile converts not to follow the Law of Moses. Paul agrees to a rite of purification in order to calm the rumors. The Jewish High Court went further in their charges, saying Paul was bringing Gentiles into the holy temple. This offense was punishable by death. Paul is given the opportunity to give his defense before the Jewish High Counsel, and in the process, offers his testimony concerning Christ. The Roman guard takes him into custody and when they learn of his Roman citizenship, he is carefully protected. Would you be willing to risk arrest for your faith in Christ? If not, how far would you go?

**Tuesday, October 20 – Read Acts 22:30-23:35 and Philippians 1:12-14.** Today we turn to Paul's trial before the Jewish High Counsel. These 40 men felt so strongly about Paul that they took an oath of fasting until he was executed. Notice the words in Acts 23:11, **"the Lord stood near to Paul and encouraged him,"** — these are powerful words. Philippians 1:12-14 are the words of Paul expressing his view of his various times of imprisonment. How to you experience the encouragement of God? Can you identify in your life time when times of trouble were "for Christ"?

**Wednesday, October 21 – Read Acts 24:1-25:12.** This section includes Paul's trials before Felix and then Festus, who replaced Felix as the Roman governor of Judea. Note the charges against Paul included in chapter 24. This time, the High Counsel has hired a lawyer — likely one accustomed to arguing in the Roman courts. Use your imagination to envision this scene. What do you think Paul is feeling while he is waiting to testify? Notice also the tragedy of Felix' response to Paul — when the Holy Spirit was bearing down upon his heart during Paul's preaching (Acts 24:25). Felix dismisses Paul, saying he will call him at a more "convenient time." He let the moment pass by in which he might have experienced salvation in Christ. For two years, Paul remains in Caesarea. Have there been times in your life when you have put off your relationship with Christ because it was not convenient? How can you guard against this in the future?

**Thursday, October 22 – Read Acts 25:13-26:32.** In this section, we will hear another of Paul's defenses, now before King Herod Agrippa II, who ruled over the areas in the northern part of Palestine. King Agrippa would have been most familiar with "the Way" as Christianity was called at the time, as there were now tens of thousands of believers throughout Palestine. Festus was not familiar with it, having just come from Rome — a city of over 1,000,000, where there were only a few hundred Christians. Both Festus and Agrippa want to set Paul free. Yet, the tone in verse 32 may have a bit of sarcasm to it, that if only Paul had not requested the trial before Caesar, he would go free. Thus it is his own fault he will be sent away. The most descriptive account of Paul's conversion is in found in this section. Read this twice. How would you compare your own conversion to Paul's? Did you grow up in the faith or did you come to know Christ as an adult? How do you think these two experiences differ?

**Friday, October 23 – Read Acts 27:1-28:31.** This section includes Paul's journey by ship to Rome. The shipwreck is said to be an excellent account of seamanship and first century shipping practices. As you read these verses, look for the character of Paul as he continues his ministry to the end — preaching to Jews and Gentiles alike, the gospel of Jesus Christ. Notice Paul is just under house arrest for these two years. As such, he is still able to carry out his work. Paul was either released at the end of two years, perhaps because his accusers never arrived from Jerusalem, or he was tried and sentenced to prison for a time. If released, he may have traveled to Spain and perhaps even back to revisit some of the churches from earlier journeys. In either case, the early church records that Paul was beheaded under Nero around 64 A.D. What have you learned about Paul during this series of sermons? What have you learned about yourself?



## STUDY GUIDE & DAILY READINGS

Sunday, October 18, 2009

### TRUST

#### STAGES *(Following the Journeys of Paul)*, Week 5 of 5

##### **2 Timothy 4:6-8 — The Word from the Bible (Today's New International Version)**

***For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day — and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.***

##### **2 Timothy 4:6-8**

Here in Paul's second letter to Timothy, we find what are believed to be his words near the time of his death. He uses the words **"on the point of being sacrificed,"** which seem to indicate he is aware of some impending danger. He compares himself to the disciplined athlete. He has **"fought the good fight."** Like the contestant in the arena, he has done his best. He has **"finished the race"** — suggesting both the heroic struggle in the race Paul has run and the nearness of its end. He has **"kept the faith."** Just as the athlete gains a reward by receiving the victor's wreath, so Paul need only await the **"crown of righteousness,"** to be bestowed by Christ himself at **"his appearing"**.

Examining the courage and deep faith of Paul can cause one to lose touch with this apostle. We might ask: How can anyone ever achieve the spiritual maturity of Paul? How will I ever measure up? As we retell the story of Paul it is easy to put him out of touch as a super-Christian-hero.

Careful reading of Paul's letters and the historical letters of the early church leaders put him more in perspective. Paul was human, just like any other follower of Christ. The writers of that day tell us he was not very attractive. He was argumentative, demanding, ambitious and often forgetful.

Paul himself tells us of his own struggle with sin with these words in Romans 7:15-25, **"I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate... Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord."**

In 2 Corinthians 12:5-10, Paul speaks of his problems with his ego and pride and how he seems to deal with an emotional or physical ailment. In Acts 15:36-16:5, he has an argument with his friend and traveling companion Barnabas that is so severe that we never hear from Barnabas again.

Paul was every bit a human with faults just like anyone else. By faith, he faced whatever came. By faith, he overcame the limits of his body, his pride and his doubts. The Paul we find in Rome courageously facing death writing these words to Timothy is far different than the fearful anxious Paul who is converted on the Damascus Road. From the moment he witnessed the resurrected Christ, Paul began a process of change and transformation

— not all at once, but slowly, experience stacked upon experience. As we look back over the life and journeys of Paul we can see the stages of his development — and find hope for our future with Christ.

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### ***Paul’s Arrest, Imprisonment, and Martyrdom***

Acts is our only source for the events in Jerusalem leading up to Paul’s appeal to Caesar and the dramatic record of his journey to Rome (21:17-28:31). Even the “prison letters” — Philippians, Philemon, Colossians, Ephesians and 2 Timothy — throw almost no light on the Pauline biography.

From Acts, we learn of Paul’s rescue by the Roman soldiery from the hands of a temple mob, aroused by the rumor that he had brought Gentiles into the inner court, and of the permission granted him to address his accusers — an address which permits the author to insert the second account of Paul’s conversion (Acts 21:18-22:21) but which it is difficult to imagine that a Roman officer would allow. Paul’s assertion of Roman citizenship saves him from scourging (22:22-29), but he is brought before the Sanhedrin in order that the authorities may be enlightened on the real issues involved (22:30). The turn of the controversy to the question of resurrection must have left them uninformed (23:1-10).

Paul’s removal to Caesarea, when the plot to assassinate him was discovered, and his relations with the governor Felix and his Jewish wife, Drusilla, including the charges brought against Paul by the Jews, and his defense, are recorded in Acts 23:12-24:27. The “two years” of 24:27 are usually reckoned as the time of Paul’s imprisonment, although the alternative view — i.e., the term of Felix’ governorship — remains a possibility.

Chapters 25-26 give the next act in the drama, with Festus, successor to Felix, and Agrippa and Bernice as the actors, and the Jews as the accusers. Given the choice of going up to Jerusalem to stand trial before Festus, Paul appeals to Caesar. He makes his final defense before Agrippa; it consists, in the main, of the third account of his conversion, the three (9:1; 22:3) serving as a kind of chorus to remind the reader of the motif binding the varied events into an ordered whole.

The voyage and shipwreck have been called among the best sea tales from antiquity (Acts 27-28). Paul is at last at Rome (28:14), but what the closing verses of the book: ***“He lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ quite openly and unhindered”*** (28:30-31), intend to convey to the reader and why they form the conclusion of Acts — these questions are left unanswered by Acts. Was Paul released? Was he martyred? And why, in either case, did the author not inform his readers?

From *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*

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### ***The Events leading up to Paul Execution***

There are three accepted theories concerning the life of Paul not included in the book of Acts.

First, some believe that the accusers of Paul from Jerusalem never came to Rome to bring a case against Paul.

The Roman authorities got tired of waiting and released Paul. There is some evidence to support that Paul may have gone to Spain after his release. There he preached and started churches before returning to Rome.

Second, some believe that the accusers from Jerusalem did come to Rome, and in the trial before the Emperor, Paul was found innocent and released. Again, the belief is that Paul probably traveled to Spain to preach and start churches before returning to Rome.

Third, some believe that the trial before the Emperor did not go well and Paul was sentenced prison.

All the theories agree that during the persecutions of Christians under the rule of Caesar Nero, Paul somehow end up in the Mamertine Prison in Rome. No one knows how long Paul stayed there, but at some point, he was identified as one of the leaders of the Christians in Rome and executed. The fact that he was a Roman citizen kept him from being crucified. Instead, he was beheaded on the banks of the Tiber River outside the walls of Rome at Ad Aquas Salvias. It was renamed Tre Fontane (the place of three fountains) after a legend associated with Paul’s death. The legend claims that when Paul was beheaded, three springs erupted where his head landed. These springs still flow today. He was buried at a cemetery on Ostian Way nearer Rome. The church, Saint Paul’s Outside the Walls (originally built by Constantine in 324 and rebuilt in 1854), stands over the site of Paul’s burial.

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### ***Prayer Focus***

Trietsch is a praying church. This morning, as you worship, one of our prayer volunteers is praying for everyone in each section of our worship center. We believe that prayer changes lives and hearts for good and for God.

We invite you to join these volunteers by praying for those persons around you. We believe these prayers will have an immediate impact on those for whom you are praying.

Remember... someone is praying for you. Here a few prayers to guide you, written by some of our church members.

#### ***Heavenly Father,***

***You have given me a community of supporters called the church. Let our fellowship be a reflection of the love we feel for each other and the love we feel for You. Amen  
(Published in the women’s ministry newsletter)***

#### ***Lord,***

***You offer many opportunities at this church to extend Your love. Everyone here needs to love and be loved, and everyone has the capacity to do both. Open our eyes to the needs around us, including our own. Show us how to open our hearts to give and receive love. Amen.***

#### ***Heavenly Father,***

***The privilege of corporate worship is a gift you have given us. Not only do You care for us individually, you also care for us as a community of believers. Our worship experience is not complete when we isolate ourselves. show us how to receive the gift of corporate worship this morning. Amen.***