

Reading Schedule for May 14-20, 2018

We will finish the Book of Acts by the end of this week. You can anticipate our reading schedule shifting to the Old Testament, as I am eager to read Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther over the next several weeks. This week will be especially inspiring as well because it leads us up to the launch of the church, then and now, and what we hope New Harvest might become for the glory of God. The Lord determines that Paul will preach in Rome, and that's how the story concludes. May the Book of Acts continue to inspire you.

May 14 - Acts 22:22-23:11: "Then Paul, knowing that some of them were Sadducees and the others Pharisees, called out in the Sanhedrin, 'My brothers, I am a Pharisee, descended from Pharisees. I stand on trial because of the hope of the resurrection of the dead.'" (v.6) It is interesting that even among the Jews there was disagreement on particular aspect of theology. The Pharisees believed in angels and spirits and in the future resurrection, though they did not accept Jesus' resurrection. The Sadducees rejected the very idea of a resurrection, as well as believing in angels and spirits. The Pharisees overall were more receptive to Paul's message, while the Sadducees rejected his testimony altogether. Verse 11 verifies the determined intent of God to bring Paul to Rome. I am continually amazed at Paul's courage, and I am also amazed at the stubbornness of the religious leaders and their human pride to reject the facts about Jesus' resurrection. What impresses you about the reading today?

May 15 - Acts 23:12-35: "But when the son of Paul's sister heard of this plot, he went into the barracks and told Paul." (v.16) This part of the story is impressive to me from start to finish. An obscure connection to Paul is able to hear about a plot against his life. I notice how often the Scriptures highlight God orchestrating the details of life. The Lord has already spoken to Paul about going to Rome, so Paul was not worried. Our question would be, how would God protect him so he would make it to Rome. We are getting our answers very quickly as Paul's nephew courageously tells the guards about the plan against his uncle. How do you respond to this kind of detail in the story? What else impressed you about the reading today?

May 16 - Acts 24:1-27: "We have found this man to be a troublemaker, stirring up riots among the Jews all over the world. He is a ringleader of the Nazarene sect . . ." (v.5) We are sorting out the accusation against Paul. His crimes are said to be stirring up riots, being a Christian ringleader, and profaning the temple. The Romans have serious consequences for stirring up riots. The Apostle Paul was delighted to be a Christian leader and courageously spoke in affirmation of his testimony in Jesus Christ. The third he flatly denied, but was the main concern of the Jewish contingency. This must have been very frustrating for Paul, but I also sense an underlying trust in the plans of God. Paul had learned that he was protected by God, or he would be dead by now. Sometimes our own safety undermines our real trust in God. If we knew that our safety was solely in the hands of God, our trust level would increase. Do you agree? How do you respond to this reading today?

May 17 - Acts 25:1-27: "Festus answered, 'Paul is being held at Caesarea, and I myself am going there soon.'" (v.4) The part of the story that gets my attention is how we concluded our reading yesterday, with Paul being imprisoned for two years in Caesarea. The conspirators wanted to have Paul brought to Jerusalem, where they intended to kill him before he even arrived in Jerusalem. Festus unknowingly protected Paul by insisting that any hearing should take place in his headquarters at Caesarea. I don't understand the delay, but I do sense God using Festus to protect Paul and to honor his appeal to Caesar. The Emperor at that time was Nero, who I identified recently in a sermon about how cruel he was. In God's providence, Agrippa arrives, who is more aware of the tension

that pertains to the Jewish religion and their charges against Paul. This is another marvelous opportunity for Paul to testify about Jesus Christ in front of a king. Get ready for tomorrow as Paul tries to lead the King to Christ. What do you take with you after the reading today? We have been reading longer sections in this narrative. I hope you have been encouraged by Paul's courage.

May 18 - Acts 26:1-32: "The king is familiar with these things, and I can speak freely to him. I am convinced that none of this has escaped his notice, because it was not done in a corner." (v.26) I could have chosen several verses that are culminating with this face to face encounter of such significant dignitaries. Paul speaks to them respectfully, but also boldly. Agrippa knew that Paul was trying to persuade him to be a Christian. That was the essence of his question. It is impressive to realize that Paul does not back down when he is given such a marvelous opportunity. I am sure that he thought of this as a divine appointment especially orchestrated by God so that he would make the most of it. There is a point about convincing someone in a short time, as is referenced in verse 28. Quite often, our consistent love and respectful input takes time for a person to respond to the Gospel. I have seen people come to faith very quickly, and then other times it has taken years. I would suggest to you that more often than not, it takes time. Don't give up too quickly. Remain a faithful friend and a consistent witness of your faith in Jesus Christ. How do you respond to Paul's testimony in this chapter?

May 19 - Acts 27:1-44: "In an attempt to escape from the ship, the sailors let the lifeboat down into the sea, pretending they were going to lower some anchors from the bow." (v.30) The sailors knew that they were nearing land, so they wanted to abandon ship prematurely. They would selfishly save their own lives, but the ship would be left with no one having the skill to handle the ship. Paul had told them that everyone would make it safely to shore. Paul is cooperating with divine sovereignty as he is challenging their decision to abandon ship. God will fulfill his promises, but that doesn't negate the importance of human actions as the means God uses to carry out his promises. We have seen this theme throughout the Book of Acts. Paul plays an active role in accomplishing God's promises. I would suggest the same for you. What aspect of this story gets your attention? Why?

May 20 - Acts 28:1-31: "For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all boldness and without hindrance!" (vv. 30 & 31) These verses point to the culmination of all that God had been doing in Paul's life. It says that he could share the Gospel with all who came to him. This situation most likely took place from 60-62 A.D. We know that the church in Rome was a combination of Jew and Gentile Christians. It seems like the Gospel was flourishing among the Gentiles by the reference in verse 29. This would make sense because there would be far more opportunity to speak into the lives of Gentiles as was the case throughout Paul's missionary endeavors. There is a sense of Acts 29 in my thinking. I want New Harvest to be an Acts 29 type church. What began in the Book of Acts continues in the life of churches like ours and others who share the Gospel courageously and express the love of Christ day after day. May the Lord expand his kingdom among us like he showed so clearly in the Book of Acts. These are exciting days as the world intensifies. It is more clear than ever that the only hope for this globe is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. How have you been inspired through the reading of the Book of Acts?

PRAYER: Pray for our After School Program even as we anticipate raising money for Canyonview Camp. We are hoping that many of the After School Program children will attend Canyonview Camp in June.