

# **Read the Bible in a Year**

Week 4 - July 4th, 2021

**Read on Your Own this Week:**

*Psalms 13-15*

Matthew 17-20

**Readings in Class:**

Acts 20-28

Exodus 1-8

## **A Brief Overview of Acts 20-28**

This week, the book of Acts comes to a cliffhanging of an ending. Paul finishes up his third missionary journey. As he arrives back to Jerusalem, he is arrested. His life begins to take on serious Christ-like moments that harken back to Jesus during Holy Week in Luke's Gospel. For the remainder of the book, which spans 5 years, Paul is sent on a journey to Rome to appear before the Emperor. Shockingly, Luke leaves the narrative without a resolution and without a proper ending. Several reasons abound: 1. This catches up to the present in Luke's Day. 2. The point of the book is not what happens to Paul, but "for two years, Paul preached Jesus." Jesus is important. Also, being open-ended, Luke might suggest to us that the church's story is not yet done. Acts has not yet ended and we carry on the next chapter. Perhaps the ending has yet to be written...

### **Summary of 20-28:**

After some rioting and confusion in Ephesus, Paul departs and wraps up his third missionary journey. On the return to Jerusalem Paul pauses at points to strengthen churches, appoint leaders, and to give what he believes to be "goodbye."

Along the way back, prophets and the Holy Spirit have warned Paul not to return to Jerusalem for it will be where he is arrested. Paul continues however, and soon Jesus' words about him come true, "I will show Paul how much he must suffer for my name." Paul's life does take on Christ-like dimensions as he is arrested and ping-ponged back and forth between leaders like John the Baptist and Jesus were. He is falsely accused like Jesus for desecrating the temple and supposedly bringing an Ephesian church member with him, though he didn't. And a few times, Paul is put on mock trial.

Being a Roman citizen, he appeals to the Emperor to hear his case when he sees his life is in danger, but also because Jesus had promised that his apostles would stand before kings and Emperors to bear witness. Perhaps a reason for Acts being written is that Luke uses the accounts in the back half to clear Paul's name and present him not as a rebel rouser, but someone who is falsely condemned. Paul's last trial in the book in chapter 26 has the leaders noting that Paul could have been freed if he had not appealed to the Emperor.

As Paul makes his way across the Mediterranean, in a story that mimics Jonah's account in many ways, suddenly, the boat is caught in a storm and shipwrecked. Translators have noted that chapter 27 has perhaps the most sea-nautical tale told in the ancient world.

Paul and the whole crew survives, as he had prophesied, and they winter on Malta, south of Italy. Paul survives a snake bite, reminding us of Mark's ending where it is written that those who follow Jesus would be bitten by snakes and live.

Finally, Paul arrives in Rome. As noted in the brief overview, Paul's story ends here as a surprise. But we are told that Paul spends two years (58-60 AD. Paul is said to have been killed in 67 AD) in Rome. While there, we have a final rejection of the Jew's concerning Christ and a final gathering of the Gentiles who believe. A good spot to end, focusing on the Lord Jesus.

### **A Brief Overview of Exodus**

Exodus is the big salvation moment of the Old Testament. Everything is big in Exodus. The characters, the story, and the people. The book has two major parts: 1-19 and 20-40. The first half deals with God vs. Pharaoh and the rescue of the Israelites from slavery and the journey to Mt. Sinai to ratify the covenant with God. Chapters 20-40 are perhaps a shock as the narrative deals with God vs. His People! The people of God have the same stubborn heart that Pharaoh does. And the final climax in the book that God remains true to His promise that forms the main thrust and theme of the book and is repeated several times here and dozens of times elsewhere in the Bible: "You shall be my people. And I will be your God."

**Judgment on the gods of Egypt:** Perhaps lost amidst the plagues is the reason for them. God here goes to war against the gods of Egypt, who hold the people of God captive. They work through human agents, but God's plagues are directed against the gods of Egypt. The plagues reveal who Yahweh is since Pharaoh so rudely dismissed him. "Who is YHWH and why should I care who he is? The plagues are a result of that arrogant dismissal. The Lord will reveal himself to Pharaoh, Egypt, and His People.

The plagues are in three sets (1. Blood, frogs, gnats. 2. Fies, livestock, boils. 3. Hail, locusts, darkness.) with a prologue (staff into serpent) and a final, disastrous plague (Firstborn killed) that is ominously warned ahead of time and is delayed to heighten the drama and rescue. and escalate in power and terror. This distribution into three sets of plagues will play into large parts in other Biblical thinking. Revelation has three sets of plagues, playing off Exodus, suggesting that Revelation is giving us God's Exodus through Jesus Christ and the spiritual battle that is playing out now as God desires to free us from slavery now.

**Pharaoh's Hard Heart:** In what is both nerve wracking and unsettling is the thought that God has mercy on whom he desires to have mercy and hardens whom he wishes to harden. In this case, God hardens Pharaoh's heart. Attempts to made to soften this, or get God off the hook. But the first time this is mentioned, God says he will harden Pharaoh's heart. Pharaoh's heart is hardened when he hears God's Word. This is unsettling because we don't like this idea of God doing with us as he wants. Yes, Pharaoh does harden his own heart. Yes, God also says he will harden it. What should we do with this: Thanks be to God that he has not hardened our hearts but has instead done with us what he has wanted by baptizing us into his name and saving us.

You are not Pharaoh, you are God's beloved child in Christ. Take hold of that promise and that Word from God. Pray as Jesus tells us to by saying, "thy kingdom come."

**Summary of 1-8:** The narrative picks up where Genesis left off, and gives us a helpful review. Abraham's family is in Egypt. They multiply more numerous than the stars in the heavens as God promised they would.

Finally, a pharaoh comes to power who does not remember Joseph. This is probably a new dynasty. The new Pharaoh sees the Israelites as a threat. So just like King Herod, the order is given to expose and kill all Hebrew male babies. And after several attempts finally succeeds in getting the children throw into the Nile.

Moses is born, (his name means, one who is drawn out, and he lives up to his name). His mother carefully exposes him along the way where she figures Moses will be found by Pharaoh's daughter. Miriam stays behind to watch what happens to Moses. He is indeed rescued by Pharaoh's daughter and raised in Pharaoh's house, with his mother being his nurse!

Moses, at 40 years old gets into trouble when he murders an Egyptian beating a Hebrew but is found out. He runs away to Midian, where like Jacob, he meets his wife besides a well (also see John 4). He lives 40 years in Midian until the Lord appears to him in the burning bush and commissions Moses to go to Pharaoh.

Moses meets Aaron his brother and together the two confront Pharaoh with the demand to let God's people go, under the impression that it is just for worship and they will be back! This assumption plays into Pharaoh until the very end during Passover.

What begins is a conflict between Pharaoh and the gods of Egypt, and the Lord God who has come to his people to redeem them from the house of all who hate them. Where our week ends this time around is amid the plagues as they go from bad to worse. And Pharaoh who keeps making promises and not coming through on them. At first, Pharaoh's magicians are able to replicate the plagues, but soon they are no match for the Lord and his mighty arm and outstretched hand that will not relent until His people are released from the slavery and oppression.