

Resources for



Week 2.

The journey to Rome begins

SETTLING

As we'll see, Paul had very good reason to be thankful for his close family. If looking at this in your Small Group, perhaps just share a little about who your close family are, your brothers or sisters, nephews and nieces. Might this be a prompt to touch base with them (especially if it's been a while) perhaps an e-mail or a phone call? If you don't have any close family perhaps just ponder on who those are that may be take their place in your life, good friends, neighbours etc.

FOCUSING

As you bring your focus on to God, read through slowly and carefully Psalm 91. This is quite a tricky Psalm with which to identify. On the one hand it speaks of great confidence in God but equally some of the statements seem remote from real-life experience. In reality "bad things do happen to good people". Perhaps it reminds us of things we covered in our series on Daniel, about having faith even when things become life-threateningly tough. Verse 15 includes the line;

"I will be with him in trouble".

Perhaps we can feel encouraged, as we read about Paul's problems in this week's reading, to find the ways to not only believe in, but also experience God's presence, especially in the really challenging times.



Read through Acts 22 vs30 - 23 vs34:

Chapter 23 verses 1-10. Shaken, perhaps by the revelation that Paul was a Roman citizen, the Army Commander decides to use his authority to summon the Sanhedrin (the Jewish supreme court) and get them to sort out exactly what the issues were with Paul.

Paul starts well but soon ignites the wrath of the High Priest, whom Paul calls "a whitewashed wall". Consider just what Paul meant by this.

Next, Paul "lobs a theological hand grenade" into the mix by mentioning the "resurrection of the dead". It has the desired effect of splitting the court along party lines and seemingly securing for Paul the backing of the Pharisees! Chaos reigns! Arguably exactly what Paul intended. Why do you think he might have decided on such a tactic?

Verse 11: *The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, 'Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome.'*

How do you think Paul would have felt about this encounter with Jesus?

Verses 12-22 Hand on heart – did you know that Paul had a sister and a nephew in Jerusalem? (me neither!)

The “Jews” in this plot were probably hard-line Zealots but what is also clear is that the rest of the Sanhedrin knew about the scheme.

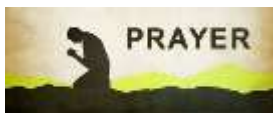
It is hard for us to really get a measure of just how fundamental were the issues about Jews and Gentiles. Beliefs and opinions were strongly entrenched and the determination of the high-ranking Jews in Jerusalem, to eradicate the problem, is clear.

The matter, of course, raised real issues for the early church, and as we’ve seen, it constantly raises its head throughout Acts, and also in Paul’s letters.

Consider, or discuss, how different the story might have been if the Jews had open-heartedly accepted Jesus as the Messiah and then embraced gentiles as fellow believers. Why, do you think, that for many Jews, all this was just too much to ask?

Verses 23 -35: Understandably the Roman Commander in Jerusalem (Claudius Lysias) realises the seriousness of the situation and decides that Paul needs to be extracted from the city before things get out of hand. It seems that he chooses to conceal Paul in a scheduled troop movement (Paul surely did not merit an escort of 470 Roman Soldiers!) In addition, he was probably more than willing to “shunt” the Paul problem out of Jerusalem and higher up the chain of command, to the Roman Governor of the province, Felix, who resided down on the Mediterranean coast at Caesarea.

Thinking back to verse 11, how do you imagine Paul felt about this move to Caesarea and being brought before Governor Felix? Does it seem that Paul actually had a master plan, to fulfil his commission to be a witness for Jesus in Rome, and was it a plan that was “coming together”?



Perhaps take this opportunity to spend some time praying, both in thankfulness and intercession, for your close family and/or friends.

Pray for those who suffer injustice, in a legal setting, be they wrongly accused perpetrators of crimes or innocent victims.

Pray for our bishops and those in positions of leadership in the church, currently grappling with difficult theological and practical issues. e.g. issues around racism.

Give thanks for those people and organisations who through their work and campaigning strive to achieve justice where it is lacking.