

Read Through the Bible

Week 29: July 19 - July 24

Readings: Psalms 22 - 40; Acts 20 - 23

Reflections by Ken Kimsey

Psalms is one of the most personal books in the Old Testament. Here David and other writers bear their hearts to God, plead for forgiveness, praise him for blessings, and pray for protection. David, a man “after God’s heart,” lived a very dangerous life, sometimes a sinful one; consequently he needed all of the above.

Below are my thoughts on selected chapters and verses from Psalms and Acts.

Chap. 22 - I am amazed at the description of Jesus’ crucifixion written many years earlier, but I also wonder what event in David’s life would prompt the psalmist to write it. “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” 22:1 A plea that many of us may have uttered.

“Deliver my life from the sword ...in the congregation I will praise him! ...Revere him all you descendents of Israel!” 22:22-23 Here the psalmist attempts to bargain with God.

Chap. 23 – “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.” This chapter is of a loving shepherd who leads his sheep through the perils of life, be they tangible or intangible, material or spiritual. It is probably the chapter most widely read by Christians as they face critical illness or reach the end of life, a chapter of comfort.

Chap 24 – 24:1-2 “The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it...he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters.” The psalmist proclaims God, the creator of heaven and earth.

Chap 25 – “Show me your ways, Oh Lord, teach me your ways....” 25:5 This should be the daily prayer of the Christian.

Chap. 26 – “Vindicate me, O Lord, for I have led a blameless life; I have trusted in the Lord

without wavering.” 26:1 Is David fooling himself? Surely he is not fooling God!

Chap. 31 - “Be merciful to me, Oh Lord, for I am in distress; my eyes grow weak with sorrow, my soul and my body with grief.” 31:9 The psalmist, in grief, pleads for mercy. “Praise be to the Lord, for he showed his wonderful love to me....” 31:21 God answers.

Chap. 34 – “Come my children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord....A righteous man may have many troubles, but the Lord delivers him from them all.” 34:11, 19 The elder teaches the young; the father teaches the children.

Chap. 40 – “I waited patiently for the Lord; he turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand.

Questions to ponder:

1. What are your emotions as you read Chapter 22?
Have you tried to bargain with God?
2. Have you faced serious illness or death?
Did you read and meditate on Chapter 23?
3. Do we, in contemporary society, view chapter 24 in the same way as David did, several thousand years ago?
4. Do we really believe that we can fool God as the psalmist attempted to do in Chapter 26?
5. Chapter 34: But do they listen?
6. In what way did the Lord lift you from the slimy pit?

Acts: Thoughts on the book (Chapters 20-23)

These chapters cover a period of time in Paul's life that can best be noted as a time of highs, lows, and dangers. He had left Ephesus after a rioting mob attempted to kill him for teaching the ways of Jesus. A local silversmith and others in the business of making and selling shrines with which to worship the Greek goddess, Artemis, feared that business would suffer if the people turned to Christianity. The Temple of Artemis, the Greek goddess of the hunt, was considered one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.

Leaving Ephesus, he travelled to Greece, and later to Macedonia, only to be faced with another murder plot promoted by local Jews who also objected to his teachings. After travelling and preaching through Macedonia, he set sail for Asia Minor. At Miletus, he met with elders of the Ephesus area for an emotional farewell. Here he reminded them that he had been faithful in teaching Jesus' message of repentance, but now he was led by the Spirit to travel to Jerusalem to an unknown fate. The Holy Spirit, however, had warned of hardship and imprisonments. "However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me- the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace." (20:24)

He leaves them a charge: "Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy spirit has made you overseers....I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock....So be on your guard!" (20:28-31).

Leaving Miletus, he continued his journey towards Jerusalem, stopping at several cities along the way to encourage believers. At Caesarea, he was again warned about going to Jerusalem. His response: "I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the

name of the Lord Jesus." (21:13) As had happened in several times before, Paul's presence in Jerusalem set off a riot. Just as the mob was about to kill him, the Roman commander broke into the crowd, rescued Paul, and ordered that he be taken into the Roman barracks. Before being taken inside, however, he was allowed to speak to the people.

From the building's steps, he related how he had previously persecuted the followers of "The Way" until he met Jesus while on the way to Damascus. The crowd responded by even stronger denunciations – "Rid the earth of him! He is not fit to live." (22:23)

When the centurion learned that Paul was a Roman citizen and there was a plot to murder him while enroute to a meeting with the Sanhedrin, he sent Paul, under heavy guard, to Caesarea to face Felix, the Roman governor. Caesarea became another way station on Paul's long journey to Rome which culminated in his teaching to the household of Caesar and, ultimately, to his death.

Questions to ponder:

1. Does Paul's conversion, after being an indirect participant to murder, have anything to say about our contemporary treatment of criminals?
2. Where are Christians being harassed and persecuted today?
3. How do you compare Paul's sufferings with American Christians who believe they are being mistreated or harassed by society for their beliefs?