

## Men's Group 10<sup>th</sup> December 2013

My apologies for this late send out. I have been suffering from a bout of flu which thankfully seems to have receded now.

In truth, we have broken the back of this book, and what remains is fairly straightforward narrative. Nonetheless, of extreme interest historically.

I hope over these two weeks, we can most certainly deal with the text of these final chapters, but also give some thought to the broader questions of what we have learnt.

Among the questions that spring to my mind are the following,

- What is the gospel message that Luke is trying to put across in this book?
- What motivated Paul to go to the extraordinary lengths of suffering that he did in order to propagate the message that he had once so despised?
- Where does modern day Christianity have its historical/ geographical roots? Jerusalem, or Antioch?
- How, if at all, does the Christianity of the book of Acts differ from modern day Christianity as we practice it? Are such differences good, bad, inevitable, avoidable, what?

### Now, to tonight's chapters.

The main dramatis personae are



**Antonius Felix** – Roman procurator of Judaea, probably AD 52 to 59. His second wife Drusilla was a daughter of Herod Agrippa I. (She died in the eruption of Vesuvius in AD 79 that buried Pompeii.)

**Porcius Festus** - Roman procurator of Judaea, AD 59 – 62

**Herod Agrippa II & his sister Berenice** – a relatively enlightened ruler by the standards of the times. He was educated in Rome and strongly pro-Roman—though a Jewish patriot in his own way (he recognized that there could be no future apart from under the Romans.) Berenice was heroic in her ultimately unsuccessful efforts to stave off the Jewish War of AD 66 – 70. She and her brother Agrippa may or may not have had an incestuous relationship. Josephus and others mention the rumour but it is unproven.



## Acts 24 – Paul before Felix in Caesarea

Interesting reference here to **'the Nazarene sect'**, another name presumably given to the early church at this time.

Simultaneously the term **'The Way'** which started in Antioch, is also still in use.

This chapter spans two years from approximately May/June AD 57 to AD 59.

One just wonders what **Luke** was up to during these two years. We know that he had arrived in Judaea with Paul the previous month. And we know that he goes with Paul on the journey to Rome. What was he doing in between? Was he in Judaea all that time? One suspects that he probably was. Doing what? Collecting material for his writing, perhaps?

## Act 25 – Paul before Festus

The appeal to Caesar is interesting. That was the right of any Roman citizen, to be tried in Rome (obviously Nero himself would be hardly likely to try the case himself, it's a figure of speech.)

Paul has no illusions that a trial before the Jewish court could end any other way than in a guilty verdict and presumably death sentence. Appeal to Rome offered a convenient way out, and additionally I'm sure he was pretty excited by the prospect of finally getting to the Imperial capital to preach the gospel.

## Acts 26 – Paul before Agrippa II

Another speech, much like the previous two! I'm not totally clear why Luke wants to repeat so many almost identical speeches from Paul.

A the end of this (Acts 27.1) Luke rejoins the story ('we')

*One other thing I've had in mind to include at some point, if people are interested, is a 16 minute discourse by Josephus giving his impressions of the three main Jewish sects of the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes. This is very interesting, not least because until the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1948 this was virtually the only evidence that the Essenes actually existed. Josephus spends rather longer on the Essenes than he does on the other two.*

*I think this is of great value in understanding the religious environment in which Jesus and the early church lived.*

*We can see how the time goes on this.*

