

The Unfinished Work Continues (Acts 28:17-31)

Introduction:

1. Paul's dream of coming to Rome was finally fulfilled and although it is recorded by Luke at the end or conclusion of the Book of Acts – it is really not the end of Paul's ministry nor is it the end of the work of the church.
 - Paul will spend about 2 years (A.D. 61-63) under house arrest
 - 1) During this period he will undoubtedly preach the gospel to the Jews and Gentiles of that region.
 - 2) During this period of time he will also write what are commonly called the prison epistles: _____, _____, _____.
 - Paul will then be released from house arrest:
 - 1) Most conclude that the reason that he was released was that there was no case against him, no real evidence and probably no witnesses to support the charges.
 - 2) Paul will be re-arrested, taken prisoner again (only this time he will be put in a Roman jail), and finally executed in A.D. 67 probably at the hands of Emperor Nero.
 - 3) During the period between his first release and his execution; Paul will travel extensively (probably to **Spain** and the region of *Macedonia, Asia, and Crete*), and he will write **I & II Timothy and Titus**.

- In case you are interested - During this same period of time (the early 60's – not the 1960's) there was other activity and ministries taking place:
 - 1) The Apostle John is ministering in the region of Ephesus and the other churches of Asia. He will write I, II & III John sometime between A.D. 60-65)
 - 2) Peter also has a ministry in Rome and he will write his first epistle around A.D. 64 (probably from Rome) and his second epistle (though his authorship is disputed by some) is written prior to his execution around A.D. 67-68.
 - 3) The Book of Hebrews (author unknown) is considered by most to have been written around A.D. 68-69.
2. Let's refresh our minds with how Paul came to Rome and then we will pick up with Luke's narrative:
- At the conclusion of Paul's third missionary journey he returned to Jerusalem to deliver the offering that was collected from the churches in Macedonia.
 - While in Jerusalem, Paul entered the Jewish temple and at some point an unruly mob shouted accusations against Paul that erupted into a frenzy that led to Paul being beaten for violating Jewish laws, customs and practices.
 - Paul will be seized by a Roman official (Lysias) and after a series of events will subsequently put on trial as a Roman citizen.
 - Paul's case will be heard by Felix, then Festus and finally by King Agrippa II and in all three cases he is never proven to be guilty.
 - Paul appeals his case to the Emperor which is the how and why of his arrival in Rome...so we pick up the story from here.

Paul Introduces Himself To The Jews In Rome (Acts 28:17-20)

1. It was Paul's custom to preach the gospel to the Jews in each town that he visited and he made no exception here. (Acts 28:17)
2. Since Paul was under house arrest he requested that they come and meet with him.
3. Paul discusses with them as to why he is in Rome and makes several important points of clarification:
 - Paul declares that he is _____ of the charges of violating Jewish customs and laws.
 - The Roman authorities were unable to find that Paul had committed a crime worthy of punishment.
 - Paul's appeal to _____ was due to the fact that had he not he might have been returned to the Jewish authorities who proved they were incapable of judging Paul fairly.
 - By coming to Rome and being heard before Caesar – Paul would have been acquitted and this would further the opportunity of the gospel being preached throughout the Roman Empire.
 - Paul was in Rome (even though he was bound in chains) for the primary purpose of declaring to the Jews that the "hope of Israel" is _____.
3. This meeting (as we will see) has limited results but it shows the immense dedication that Paul had to the Jews and his desire to see them repent and follow Jesus.
 - Paul never seems to give up on preaching about Jesus even in the midst of opposition.
 - How about you.....do you have that same passion?

The Jewish Leader Initial Response (Acts 28:21-22)

1. In their first meeting with Paul they respond to Paul's explanation as to why he is in Rome:
 - First they declare that they were unaware of Paul's case (his trial) and they neither heard nor received anything formal (letters or correspondence) from the region of Judea.
 - 1) Some find this hard to believe that they didn't know of Paul's case and whether they were being truthful.
 - 2) It is possible that the news about Paul had not reached them for it was not common for the Jews of Rome to interact with the Jews of Judea since there was no overarching centralized ruling body that had that had complete authority and control over Jews in all regions.
 - Second, they declare that no one had come to them with a "bad report" about Paul.
 - They were aware of the "sect" (known as the Way) of which Paul now aligned himself with.
 - 1) By now the followers of the Way were adopting the name "Christians" and news about this "sect" was spreading throughout the Empire, though for the most part their perception of Christianity was more negative than positive.
 - 2) By now the gospel was spreading throughout Rome due to the preaching of Peter and others so Christianity was becoming less of a "sect" and thus it perked the interest of these Jews of Rome.
2. These Jewish leaders request another meeting to discuss the matter of Christianity a bit further. (Acts 28:22)

Paul Preaches The Gospel To The Jews At Rome (Acts 28:23-24)

1. There were a couple of things that made this second meeting a little different than the first:
 - The group that came to hear Paul was _____
 - The discussion was _____ which provided a means for Paul to be persuasive in his claims about Jesus Christ.
 - On this occasion it was clear that Paul's declarations required a response because the Gospel is either completely true or it is completely false!
 - 1) Some appeared to be persuaded by what Paul preached
 - 2) Others chose not to believe
2. Paul preaches of the "Kingdom of God":
 - Jesus is the way of _____ and the means by which we are made _____ with God.
 - Paul uses the Law and the Prophets to prove that Jesus is the Messiah and only acceptable "atoning sacrifice" for mankind.
3. This concept of a Messiah dying for the sins of mankind and that His death in some way makes atonement for those sins thus making us right before God if we but believe by faith was just too strange of an idea for most of the Jews who heard Paul.
4. The gospel (the good news of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ) thus becomes a stumbling block to those who heard Paul and as such there is a division that takes place – some believe, while others simply walk away in rejection of the whole idea.
5. Does this story sound familiar – does the same thing happen today?

Rejection of Jesus Has Consequences (Acts 28:25-29)

1. The fact that there was disagreement among the Jewish leaders as to Paul's declaration that Jesus is the promised Messiah is evidence they just could not embrace the gospel.
2. Paul seizes the moment by using a familiar passage from Isaiah 6:9-10) to reveal their position before God:
 - Their refusal of Jesus shows their hearts are _____
 - Their refusal of Jesus shows their ears are _____
 - Their refusal of Jesus shows their eyes are _____
3. This is a bit of a self fulfilling prophecy as Paul makes this same declaration in Romans 11:7-10 (a letter written to the Romans while on his third missionary journey).
4. This passage in Isaiah was also quoted by Jesus (Matthew 13:14-15, John 12:39-40)
5. The consequences of this rejection will be seen in the years to come as the Jews will lose their identity and suffer persecution beyond what they ever imagined.
 - The rejection of the gospel by the Jews opens the door to the Gentile to respond to God and the result are enormous and continues even to our day and will so until Jesus returns.
 - Personally, I don't feel that God is done with His promises to Israel and those promises will see their fulfillment yet in the future (Zechariah 12:10, Zechariah 14), but until that day the rejection of Jesus by the Jews (or anyone for that matter) will have eternal consequences!
6. Do people today fear the consequences of rejecting Jesus?

The Story Ends Without An Ending (Acts 28:30-31)

1. Luke records; “And he stayed two full years in his own rented quarters and welcomed all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered.”
 - What did Paul accomplish during these two years?
 - 1) Since he was still a prisoner, his confinement to his house limited some of his evangelistic efforts, but Luke tells us the work was “**unhindered**” which gives me the impression there was some favoritism shown to Paul and allowed him to preach and teach at the very least in his own home. (Philippians 1:13, 4:22, Colossians 4:10-12, Colossians 4:14, Philemon 24)
 - 2) Based on what we read in Philippians it appears that Paul’s preaching was effective (Philippians 4:22) and he no doubt continued to disciple those in Rome who came to faith in Christ.
 - 3) He wrote four epistles (letters); _____, _____, _____, _____.
 - At some point Paul was released from house arrest and free to travel.
 - 1) Most conclude that there was such a lack of evidence (not to mention two provincial governors finding him innocent of any wrongdoing), that Paul may never have went to trial or at the very least he won by default since his accusers may never have shown up.
 - 2) It is believed that his travels (between the two imprisonments) took him to Macedonia, Achaia, Asia and then to Spain.

2. Paul will return to the cities located in the Aegean area (see map) to minister there and some point he will be taken prisoner once again, and he will be placed in a prison cell and then finally executed.

3. According to John MacArthur (Commentary on Acts Volume II, page 376); Paul is one of our primary examples of how to evangelize:
 - “Paul was a man of God who preached the gospel _____ and _____ he had the opportunity”
 - “Paul’s message was clothed in _____”
 - “Paul preached _____ and _____”
 - “Paul never _____ an opportunity”
 - “Paul preached _____ and _____”
 - “Paul preached to _____ (both Jews and Gentiles)
 - “Paul preached Jesus Christ as _____, _____ and _____”

4. The story never really ends:
 - After Paul’s death others will pick up the mantle and carry the gospel forward:
 - 1) Guys like Timothy, Titus, Mark, Luke, James and Jude (the half brothers of Jesus), Epaphroditus, Onesiphorus.
 - 2) The **Apostle John** will continue in his ministry to the churches of Asia until his death in A.D. 100
 - The story still doesn’t end there as guys like **Ignatius of Antioch, Justin Martyr and Polycarp** will continue to preach and defend the gospel during the first century.

- Then in the second and third centuries; people like **Irenaeus, Tertullian and Origen** will stand up against heresies that are permeating the church and will even give their lives defending the truth!
 - As those heresies and false doctrine (i.e. Gnosticism, Stoicism, Asceticism, Dualism, Docetism, and Arianism) began to take hold in the church; God raised up people like **Athanasius of Alexandria, Augustine of Hippo, and Jerome** to write “apologies” (defenses) of the gospel. This begins to lay the groundwork for a completed Bible.
 - As the world began to change with the rise of Islam, the attempt by Charlemagne to reunite the Roman Empire, and the subsequent Crusades against the Muslim invaders of Jerusalem – persecution came in all sorts of forms both internal and external.
 - All of this led to the need for the Scriptures to be put in written form for all to read which led to God raising up men like **John Wycliffe and Jan Hus**.
 - Due to the corruptions that infiltrated the church from governmental intervention, involvement, and influence – God brought reformers like **Martin Luther, Huldrych (Ulrich) Zwingli, John Calvin, William Tyndale and John Knox**.
 - After the reformation the church became too stale and inward thinking so the Lord brought revival through the preaching of men like **George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards, John Wesley, Charles Spurgeon, Dwight L. Moody, Billy Sunday and Billy Graham**.
5. The story still has no end and the Unfinished work remains unfinished – the question is; what are you doing to take the gospel to those who need to hear it?