

We will conclude our journey through the book of Acts today. We started with the ascension of Jesus and His last words to the disciples, telling them to stay in Jerusalem and wait for the Holy Spirit, the promise of the Father, so they would be empowered to be witnesses of Jesus to the world (Acts 1:8ⁱ). The 120 were in the upper room when on the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit filled them. Three thousand souls were converted and also filled with the Spirit (Acts 2:38ⁱⁱ), and that was just the beginning of many more who came to recognize Jesus as the Messiah.

Persecution from the Jewish leadership soon followed. Stephen was the first martyr, followed by James. The author of Acts, Luke, began by with a focus on Peter's ministry. The gospel went out from Jerusalem to the Samaritans and they too were filled with the Spirit (Acts 8:17ⁱⁱⁱ). Peter had the revelation that the gospel was to go to the Gentiles when a vision sent him to the home of the Gentile centurion, Cornelius. His whole household received the Word and was baptized in the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:44-45^{iv}).

Then Luke's focus shifted to the chief persecutor of Christians, Saul. On his way to attack Christians in Damascus, he encountered the risen Lord Jesus and was converted. He thought he had been keeping Judaism pure, but pure Judaism predicted the coming of the Messiah and His light going into the entire world (Isaiah 49:6^v; Genesis 12:3^{vi}). Saul found out that he was chosen to be the apostle to the Gentiles, which was a miraculous 360 degree about face. He then went into the desert of Arabia for three years to reinterpret all he had learned from the Scriptures considering his encounter with Jesus. Then he began preaching in synagogues that Jesus was the Messiah.

Barnabas found Saul and asked him to help with the growing church in Antioch. Then a momentous change took place in the first few verses of Acts 13:1-2^{vii}. While the elders in Antioch fasted and prayed, the Holy Spirit told them to set apart Saul and Barnabas as missionaries to unreached regions. They first went to Cyprus where the Roman governor, Sergius Paulus was converted to faith in Jesus (Acts 13:12^{viii}). From that time on Saul used his Roman name, Paul.

Three missionary journeys followed covering 15,000 miles of travel on foot and by sea. Gentile churches sprang up all over the Roman world. In the process, Paul was stoned and left for dead, beaten numerous times, and chased from town to town, but in his wake were new vibrant churches full of Gentiles and Jews who came to know the forgiveness of sins through Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit to transform lives. He also mentored men, including young Timothy, to help care for the growing churches.

On Paul's last trip to Jerusalem he was falsely accused by the Jews of having brought a Gentile into the temple and arrested by the Romans. After several years of incarceration and having witnessed to two governors and one king, Paul appealed to Rome to try the case against him. The ship he sailed on was caught in a violent storm and driven for two weeks, finally running aground on Malta. There for three months Paul had the opportunity to witness salvation in Jesus to the entire island. This is where we pick up with our final passage in Acts.

11 After three months we set sail in a ship that had wintered in the island, a ship of Alexandria, with the twin gods as a figurehead. 12 Putting in at Syracuse, we stayed there for three days. Acts 28:11-12 By the use of "we" in the text, we can assume that Luke was still with Paul. There was a large ship, probably another grain ship from Alexandria. God provided a ship large enough for the 276 men that had shipwrecked. The ship they boarded had most likely been forced to winter there by the same storm that shipwrecked Paul. When conditions improved they sailed to Syracuse and stayed there for three days. We see again the details that Luke the historian relates, which shows us this is a detailed account of what actually took place.

13 And from there we made a circuit and arrived at Rhegium. And after one day a south wind sprang up, and on the second day we came to Puteoli. 14 There we found brothers and were invited to stay with them for seven days. And so we came to Rome. Acts 28:13-14 It was no small church to host the soldiers and prisoners for seven days. To stay that long indicates to me that Julius and many of the soldiers had become believers after seeing the events on Malta. How did this church in Puteoli spring up? Acts 2:10^x tells us that there were visitors from Rome at Pentecost. They would have been discipled by the apostles and returned to their home towns to plant churches.

Paul had already written to the churches of Rome telling them of his desire to visit them. *15 And the brothers there, when they heard about us, came as far as the Forum of Appius and Three Taverns to meet us. On seeing them, Paul thanked God and took courage.* Acts 28:15 Paul's desire to meet these believers had come to pass, but surely not in the way he anticipated. There was a little detour of a two-year imprisonment in Caesarea and a three-month vacation on the island of Malta. He had heard about the church in Rome and realized its strategic location. Once there he could sow into these believers' lives in hopes that the churches there would influence the entire Roman world. He was right to think so. After several periods of intense persecution and the passing of a couple of centuries, Christianity would so influence Rome that it would become the center of Christianity. The blood of the martyrs was the seed of the church.

Constantine had little choice, as so many Roman citizens had become believers. How did this happen? There were a number of factors. One is of course the daily witness of true believers. That witness was expressed in their adoption of abandoned baby girls. These babies were rescued by Christians from the rivers and forests where Romans left them to die. Once raised in a devout family, any Roman man who wanted to marry a chaste woman had to show genuine signs of conversion. When there were epidemics, believers would stay behind and care for the sick. As families returned to their sick relative, they found them recovered and converted. Christianity cares for human life. That is why we are opposed to abortion and euthanasia. Every person is made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27^x). Life is an incredible gift and not be thrown away. Paul's incarceration was a seed that helped to spur on this great movement that saved countless lives and changed the world as we know it. Christianity changed the world more than any other movement in history. It was fundamental in changing man's view of the value of human life, thus ending slavery around the world. It was also a major

factor in the privatization of land ownership. Nearly every major field of science was founded by a Christian who desired to understand the mind of God regarding creation.

16 And when we came into Rome, Paul was allowed to stay by himself, with the soldier who guarded him. Acts 28:16 As a prisoner, Paul would have been chained to a Roman soldier, but since the charge was so minor, and surely Julius had put in a good word for him, Paul was allowed to rent a private house in which to be held. From there he could entertain guests and continue to spread the gospel verbally and in written letters.

17 After three days he called together the local leaders of the Jews, and when they had gathered, he said to them, "Brothers, though I had done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers, yet I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans. Acts 28:17 Paul is still going to the Jews first. He knows God's heart for the Jewish people and knows that when they realize that Jesus is the Messiah they make some of the best disciples. Paul was observing Jewish teaching and traditions when he was arrested (Acts 21:24^{xi}). The Jews only issue against Paul was his belief that Jesus is the Messiah. It was too humiliating for the Jewish leaders to admit that they had killed their Messiah. Power and position would be lost if they accepted this truth, as surely happened to Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus. This is the dilemma that most people face when they begin to recognize that Jesus is Lord. For some it means this loss of respect and the privileges that come with it. For others it is knowing they will lose friends and family. We humble ourselves before the truth and put Jesus first, or we go our own way. It costs a great deal to follow Jesus, but it cost Jesus even more to demonstrate God's great love for us. Jesus told us to sit down and count the cost (Luke 14:27-28^{xii}). But when you do, do so in the light of eternity and the blessings God has for those who choose Him over His creation (Matthew 25:23^{xiii}).

18 When they had examined me, they wished to set me at liberty, because there was no reason for the death penalty in my case. 19 But because the Jews objected, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar—though I had no charge to bring against my nation. Acts 28:18-19 The governors and king who listened to his case really had nothing against Paul. I don't know what charges they sent along, probably those the Jews were claiming regarding disturbing the peace in Roman cities. Paul, however, has no counter charge. He had no desire to impugn the Jewish leaders who sought to assassinate him. This is a great example of grace. When we are falsely accused, can we show as much grace and mercy as has been shown to us? Paul had no desire for retaliation even after two years of imprisonment and being shipwrecked. He knew God is sovereign and working all things together for his good (Romans 8:28^{xiv}).

20 For this reason, therefore, I have asked to see you and speak with you, since it is because of the hope of Israel that I am wearing this chain." Acts 28:20 Paul was in the temple when he was arrested. His purpose for being there was to show the Jews that he had not abandoned the traditions of the elders. He loved the Word of God delivered to his ancestors. The change in him was the interpretation of those writings and seeing them fulfilled in Jesus. So it really was for the hope of Israel that he was a prisoner. He longed for his fellow Jews to know Jesus as their Messiah (Romans 10:1^{xv}).

21 And they said to him, "We have received no letters from Judea about you, and none of the brothers coming here has reported or spoken any evil about you. 22 But we desire to hear from you what your views are, for with regard to this sect we know that everywhere it is spoken against." Acts 28:21-22 The Jewish leadership hadn't written to Rome regarding Paul. That is surprising, but perhaps they were too busy with conversions taking place in Jerusalem. These Jews in Rome did hear all the negative news about the Christian movement. This is an interesting phenomenon. Of course, there are bad examples that make a bad name for any group. But we are taught and strive to practice being good citizens and showing love and grace toward all men (Romans 13:1^{xvi}; Galatians 6:10^{xvii}). Why then is there is so often a negative attitude toward Christians? I believe the only answer is that Christian faith means a humbling of oneself and confession that we are sinners who must rely on what God has done for us. Then we should serve Him with our all. That message does not sit well with our fallen human nature. Thus, it is spoken against and attacked throughout its history. There is also the satanic influence that seeks to turn people from faith. Christian leaders are slandered relentlessly even when there is no evidence of wrong doing. But Jesus said that when that happens to you, you should rejoice because that is how the world treated His prophets and your reward in heaven is great (Matthew 5:11-12^{xviii}).

23 When they had appointed a day for him, they came to him at his lodging in greater numbers. From morning till evening he expounded to them, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets. Acts 28:23 Paul set a date with the Jews and did an entire day of teaching right out of the Old Testament to prove that Jesus is the Messiah. I have written a small book just showing Jesus was predicted in the Pentateuch, *Jesus Concealed in the Old Testament*, but it only touches on a few of the many proofs. Volumes have been written on the predictions of Jesus' coming. We need to learn and be prepared to share them with those who are open to listening like some of these Jews were. But even when we share the amazing predictions that came to pass in the life of Jesus, people will choose to stay the course of their lives for the reasons I have mentioned. The odds of any one person fulfilling *just eight* of the specific prophecies are 1 in 10²¹.^{xix} If Paul spoke all day on even more predictions; what are the odds of all those being fulfilled by one man?

24 And some were convinced by what he said, but others disbelieved. Acts 28:24 This truthful account helps us in many ways. First, it shows us that Luke was not just making up a story. If he was, he surely would have written that all were convinced and joined the local church. And secondly, He told just what he observed, and we observe the same response in our day. Nothing has changed because man's heart doesn't.

25 And disagreeing among themselves, they departed after Paul had made one statement: "The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your fathers through Isaiah the prophet: 26 "Go to this people, and say, "You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive." 27 For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed; lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and

turn, and I would heal them.’²⁸ Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen.” Acts 28:25-28 Paul was quoting Isaiah 6:9-10, God’s words to Isaiah regarding the nation of Israel before the captivity. Isaiah had more predictions about the Messiah than any other prophet. It is fitting that he would also have recorded God’s prediction of the Jewish leaders’ reluctance to hear his message.

But let us look carefully at what was predicted, lest it become a prediction for us as well. We can come to church every Sunday and hear the Word of God like these Jews did every Sabbath, and yet go our own way. Jesus transforms lives. Those who are in Christ are new creations (2 Corinthians 5:17^{xx}). If our life has not changed since we claimed to be a follower of Jesus, we should examine our hearts and see who we are really living for. Where is our love for Jesus and our fellow man demonstrated?

³⁰ He lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, ³¹ proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance. Acts 28:30-31 We often note the God incidences that we see in our fellowship. I must admit that I’m pretty amazed that just as we leave Paul at this point, a movie was released that is focused on the rest of the story, Paul the Apostle. It is fictional, but gives a sense of the conclusion of his incredible mission.

I would like to close our study in Acts with a quote from the Life Application Bible commentary. “There sat the greatest apostle and spokesman for Christianity—unable to move freely and minister as he desired. However, Paul didn’t complain or despair. He simply did what he could. Able to receive visitors, he taught, preached, and counseled even while he was confined to quarters. He wrote letters, commonly called his Prison Letters, to the Ephesians, Colossians, and Philippians—letters that have impacted millions of believers down through the centuries. He also wrote personal letters, such as the one to Philemon. Luke was with Paul in Rome (2 Timothy 4:11^{xxi}). Timothy often visited him (Philippians 1:1^{xxii}; Colossians 1:1^{xxiii}; Philemon 1:1^{xxiv}), as did Tychicus (Ephesians 6:21^{xxv}), Epaphroditus (Philippians 4:18^{xxvi}), and Mark (Colossians 4:10^{xxvii}). Paul witnessed to the whole Roman guard (Philippians 1:13^{xxviii}) and was involved with the Roman believers. If you find yourself in a “negative” or unpleasant situation, look for ways to redeem the circumstances. There is never a time or place in which you can’t glorify and serve God.”^{xxix}

Moody said that the world has yet to see what God can do with a man fully consecrated to him. In the life of the Apostle Paul we come pretty close to that goal. May God help us yield our lives in surrendered love, service, and devotion, which is our reasonable response to all that God has done for us so that many more may hear and believe (Romans 12:1-2^{xxx})! Luke’s account was a summary of obedience to the opening words of Acts: *⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”* Acts 1:8 Now it is our turn to live out this 2000 year old command.

Questions

- 1 Give a brief overview of Acts.
- 2 What do the details tell us?
- 3 Why is Paul so glad to see the believers from Rome?
- 4 Where is Paul held and in what condition?
- 5 What does Paul do for two years?
- 6 Who does he first invite to see him?
- 7 What does he share with them?
- 8 How does their response warn us?
- 9 What does Paul's life teach us?
- 10 What is the overall message of Acts?

ⁱ **Acts 1:8 (ESV)**

⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

ⁱⁱ **Acts 2:38 (ESV)**

³⁸ And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

ⁱⁱⁱ **Acts 8:17 (ESV)**

¹⁷ Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit.

^{iv} **Acts 10:44-45 (ESV)**

⁴⁴ While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word.

⁴⁵ And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles.

^v **Isaiah 49:6 (ESV)**

⁶ he says: "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

^{vi} **Genesis 12:3 (ESV)**

³ I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

^{vii} **Acts 13:1-2 (ESV)**

¹ Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.

² While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."

^{viii} **Acts 13:12 (ESV)**

¹² Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had occurred, for he was astonished at the teaching of the Lord.

^{ix} **Acts 2:10 (ESV)**

¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome,

^x **Genesis 1:27 (ESV)**

²⁷ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

^{xi} **Acts 21:24 (ESV)**

²⁴ take these men and purify yourself along with them and pay their expenses, so that they may shave their heads. Thus all will know that there is nothing in what they have been told about you, but that you yourself also live in observance of the law.

^{xii} **Luke 14:27-28 (ESV)**

²⁷ Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. ²⁸ For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it?

xiii **Matthew 25:23 (ESV)**

23 His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.'

xiv **Romans 8:28 (ESV)**

28 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

xv **Romans 10:1 (ESV)**

1 Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved.

xvi **Romans 13:1 (ESV)**

1 Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.

xvii **Galatians 6:10 (ESV)**

10 So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

xviii **Matthew 5:11-12 (ESV)**

11 'Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

xix <http://y-jesus.com/what-are-the-odds/>

xx **2 Corinthians 5:17 (ESV)**

17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

xxi **2 Timothy 4:11 (ESV)**

11 Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry.

xxii **Philippians 1:1 (ESV)**

1 Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons:

xxiii **Colossians 1:1 (ESV)**

1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,

xxiv **Philippians 1:1 (ESV)**

1 Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons:

xxv **Ephesians 6:21 (ESV)**

21 So that you also may know how I am and what I am doing, Tychicus the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord will tell you everything.

xxvi **Philippians 4:18 (ESV)**

18 I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God.

xxvii **Colossians 4:10 (ESV)**

10 Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, and Mark the cousin of Barnabas (concerning whom you have received instructions—if he comes to you, welcome him),

xxviii **Philippians 1:13 (ESV)**

13 so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ.

xxix Life Application Study Bible.

xxx **Romans 12:1-2 (ESV)**

1 I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.