



ACTS: ENDS OF THE EARTH ACTS 28: 11-31

STUDY GUIDE
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[Act 28:11-31 ESV] 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. 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. 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. 16 And when we came into Rome, Paul was allowed to stay by himself, with the soldier who guarded him. 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. 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. 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." 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." 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. 24 And some were convinced by what he said, but others disbelieved. 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." 29 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.

STRUCTURE:

- I. The King of the Kingdom provides for His messenger (11-16)
- II. The Hope of the Kingdom fulfills Israel's story (17-22)
- III. The Invitation of the Kingdom divides the hardened from the humble (23-29)
- IV. The Gospel of the Kingdom advances without hindrance (30-31)

Commentary:

Luke's narrative began with Jesus preaching the kingdom of God (1:3); now, it ends with Paul preaching about the same kingdom. The title—the Book of Acts—has often been understood as the Acts of the Apostles, with a special emphasis on Peter and Paul. But Peter mostly disappears after Acts 12, and Paul's story doesn't really end. Luke tells us nothing about his testimony before Caesar or his eventual release and re-arrest. Worse, it ends with Paul in chains. If Paul, or Peter, or any of the apostles are the heroes—this story is poorly told. But they are not the heroes. In Luke's mind, this is not, "The Acts of the Apostles," but rather "The Acts of the Exalted Christ." In Acts 1, King Jesus ascended into heaven. His ascension was not just a form of heavenly transportation—it was an enthronement. He ascended to the Father's right hand, and He assumed the throne of His father David. Having completed His work of redemption, the King of the Kingdom then poured out His Spirit on the church to continue His work of redemption—from Jerusalem, to Judea, to Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. Acts 28 shows how the King's story is still being written: through us.

The narrative of this final section reveals first how the King provides for His messenger, Paul, so that the story can continue in Rome. Upon arrival, Paul wastes no time clarifying to Jewish leaders how this "kingdom story" did not begin with the Man from Nazareth; rather, it was fulfilled in Him. The hope of the kingdom was announced first by Moses and all the Prophets. Unfortunately—like their fathers who rejected Moses and the Prophets—most of Paul's Jewish audience rejects its own hope. As we've seen throughout Acts, however, neither hardness of heart nor prison nor any obstacle can truly obstruct the King and His saving message. While the door of salvation swings shut on these hardened Jews, it swings wide open for the Gentiles—"and they will listen" (v. 28).

The final verses of Acts tell us how the gospel advances “unhindered” (v. 31). Dr. Schreiner informs us that “It was an ancient literary convention to end abruptly with a highly significant word and make the reader reflect back on the work.” Throughout the Book of Acts, Satan has employed every tactic: violence, imprisonment, injustice, martyrdom, hypocrisy, ethnocentrism, famine, storms, and even a snake bite. None of them worked. On the contrary, every assault of the kingdom of darkness has only served to advance the gospel of King Jesus. He reigns over heaven and earth, and His message will reach the ends of the earth—through us—unhindered.

Verse-by-verse Commentary:

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. 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. 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. 16 And when we came into Rome, Paul was allowed to stay by himself, with the soldier who guarded him:

—“After three months we set sail in a ship that had wintered in the island”:

- They remained on Malta for the winter, enjoying the hospitality of the natives.
- Having lost their prior ship to the storm, they charter a new one.
- Luke wants us to see these events through the lens of God’s sovereignty: The King of Heaven ensures that His messengers are cared for and that His message lands. The loss of a boat does not result in a loss for the gospel. God can provide another vessel, but He provides just one gospel. Salvation is found in none other.

—“a ship of Alexandria, with the twin gods as a figurehead”:

- “Alexandria” was a great center for learning. Therefore, Paul’s passage to the center of the political world is helped by center of the intellectual world. Culture and Gospel intersect in the journey of this Jewish inmate.
- “the twin gods as a figurehead”:
 - These gods were named Castor and Pollux, the sons of Zeus. They hung over the water from the ship’s bow, mounted on white horses of ocean foam.
 - Ancient sailors would have viewed these gods as protectors who ensured safe passage. Luke is winking at us: their ‘divine’ protection is a farse. We have just read of Paul’s violent shipwreck in the prior passage, where pagan sailors “prayed” in vain to their gods (27:29). Salvation is not found in the twin gods of the sea but rather the Triune God over all creation.
 - The twin gods are figureheads—and nothing more.

—“Syracuse... Rhegium... Puteoli”:

- Syracuse was the capital of Sicily (the soccer ball on Italy’s boot). Sicily is 58 miles north of Malta.
- Rhegium: the toe of Italy’s boot.
- Puteoli: Eastern coastline of Italy, about 200 miles north of Rhegium, but still south of Rome. From here, they will take a landward route on a famous Roman road.

—“There we found brothers and were invited to stay with them for seven days”:

- Relative to our prison system, Rome’s rules are loose. They continue letting his friends provide for him. Paul even stays in their home for seven days!
- Paul was greeted warmly on Malta, and how he is treated hospitably here too. God sees the intensity of Paul’s trials, mitigating them with human hospitality. In our own trials, too, we can expect God to mercifully stoop down and minister through others.
- Earlier in Acts, we saw that “the word of the Lord went forth speedily.” More speedily than Paul, in fact. The gospel is not constrained by the pace of one messenger.

—“And so we came to Rome”: Paul has striven toward the Empire’s capital for over 2.5 years, having suffered prison and shipwreck. We might have expected a grand announcement of their “at last” arrival, but Luke states it like a minimalist. Why? This is Luke’s way of downplaying Paul’s story, lest we think of him as the hero—the functional center. But this is not about Paul. It’s about the gospel of Jesus—the true hero of the story—who already reached Rome before Paul arrived (“And the brothers were there”, v. 15).

—“came as far as the Forum of Appius and Three Taverns to meet us”:

- The Christian community in Rome preceded Paul, and they greeted him warmly like those in Puteoli. God continues ministering to His battered servant—as He does to us when we suffer—through His body, the church.

- “the Three Taverns” required a 30-mile trek for Roman believers down the famous Appian Way—a road to Rome, and ancient engineering marvel, that still exists. The “Forum of Appius” required an extra ten miles. These Christians were eager to meet and bless the imprisoned apostle.
- Christians should emulate the eager hospitality of these Roman Christians.
- The outcome of such eager hospitality is that Paul “thanked God and took courage” (v. 15). When the body builds itself up in love, we multiply thanksgiving and courage. Without such mutual edification, ingratitude, cowardice, and despair multiply.

—“Paul was allowed to stay by himself, with the soldier who guarded him”: Paul was on house arrest. This detail tees up the liberal gospel proclamation in the following section.

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. 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. 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.” 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.”

—“After three days he called together the local leaders of the Jews”:

- After all Paul has suffered, he wastes no time. No doubt aided by the encouragement of his Christian brothers, Paul immediately proclaims Jesus.
- As has been his pattern, Paul proclaims the gospel “first to the Jews, then to the Gentiles” (cf. Rom. 1). In the plan of salvation, Jews got “first dibs.” Theirs were the patriarchs, the covenants, the Scripture, and the patriarchs.
- We saw this pattern throughout Acts. In Pisidian Antioch (13:46), Corinth (18:6), and Ephesus (19:8-9), Paul offered the gospel first to Jews—who largely rejected it—and then to Gentiles. This sets up what will happen as this section, and as the Book of the Acts, come to a close. Most Jews will reject the gospel; multitudes of Gentiles “will listen” (28:28).

—In vv. 17-20, Paul defends his character, mission, and alignment with the Judaic hope.

- V. 17: Even though he had “done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers”, the Jewish leaders had him arrested.
- V. 18-19: Even though the Romans “wished to set me at liberty”, the Jewish leaders “objected,” so Paul appealed to Caesar. They did this despite Paul issuing “no charge... against my nation.”
- V. 20: In light of Paul’s imprisonment being unjust—he committed no crime against Jewish people, Jewish customs, or the Jewish nation—there remains only one reason for his presence in Rome: “the hope of Israel”.
- Therefore, Paul “asked to see... and speak with” these Jewish leaders: to clarify the nature of the charges against him. He has neither been a rabble-rouser nor a heretic, but a faithful witness to Israel’s hope, the gospel of the Christ.
- Luke employs this portion of the narrative as an apologetic defense of the innocent Paul and as a theological statement about his message: the gospel is not a wild and diseased branch of Judaism but rather Judaism-in-full-bloom.

—“We have received no letters from Judea about you, and none of the brothers coming here has reported or spoken any evil about you”:

- The response of the Jewish leaders reinforces Paul’s innocence in two ways:
 - First, Paul’s accusers have not communicated anything about him. In the ancient court system, to level legal accusations against someone without personal follow up—not even a letter—suggests their case is flimsy.
 - Second, Jewish people in Rome had not accused Paul of any wrongdoing.
- Jesus instructs us to be “innocent of doves” in our gospel proclamation. People will charge us with all kinds of evil, but if we do what is right, their accusations will not stick. In contrast, if we live in hypocrisy, our secret sins will come to light and cast a shadow over the truth.
- I am reminded of Peter’s statement: “But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed...” (1 Pet. 4:15-16). Suffering is sure to come, but let it not be on account of our shameful behavior. Our lives must comport to the gospel we preach.

—“But we desire to know what your views are, for with regard to this sect we know that everywhere it is spoken against”:

- Paul has made clear that he has not opposed, but rather proclaimed, the ancient hope of Israel. They accept Paul's innocence, but they are confused about his views. Does Paul's view of “the hope of Israel” align with the law and the prophets, as he claims? If so, then why do so many of their Jewish brothers oppose it?
- The burning question on their hearts sets up an answer to that question. The reason people oppose this “sect” is not because of theological aberration—although they arrogantly frame it this way—but rather hardness of heart.

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. 24 And some were convinced by what he said, but others disbelieved.

—“When they had appointed a day... they came to him at his lodging in greater numbers”: It is no longer just the leaders of Israel but a broader circle of Roman Jews.

—“From morning till evening he expounded to them”: This was not a single sermon but a day-long Bible study, an exposition of Scripture. Paul has argued that his gospel equates to “the hope of Israel.” Now, he intends to convince them that the historical Jesus of Nazareth fulfills “the Law of Moses and from the Prophets” (v. 23).

—“testifying to the kingdom of God”:

- The “kingdom of God” vernacular has not often arisen in Acts, but it frames the beginning and end of the narrative. In Acts 1:3, the risen Christ spends forty days instructing His apostles “about the kingdom of God.” The disciples respond by confusing “the kingdom of God” with “the kingdom of Israel” (1:6)—as if the theocratic, political entity equated precisely to God's kingdom on earth. Contextually, the kingdom of Israel had been exiled for centuries due to disobedience and was now subjugated to Rome—and to its false Jewish monarch, Herod. Therefore, Jesus quickly corrects them: the kingdom of God is ruled by David's descendant, King Jesus, who poured out His Spirit on the church (1:8) and ascended to His eternal throne before their very eyes (1:9-11; cf. 2:29-36).
- In Jesus—not in Herod—David's fallen kingdom had been restored with this result: “that the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name” (Acts 15:16-17; cf. Amos 9:11-12). In other words, the tsunami of Gentile salvations testified to the restoration of David's kingdom in Jesus.
- This is not to suggest that God's kingdom is not a “theocratic, political entity.” It's just different than what Israel imagined. The Jews thought Christ would come to vanquish His enemies and establish Israel's global hegemony all at once. But that didn't happen—at least not so fast. Instead, Christ died by the imperial sword He was supposed to overthrow. Jesus conquered, just as the Jews expected—but not like they expected. He conquered by being conquered. Three days after His death, Jesus rose, and then He ascended as Caesar's superior: “the ruler of the kings of the earth” (Rev. 1:5). From His position on David's throne and at the Father's right hand, He poured out His Spirit on the church to welcome the whole world—Jew and Gentile—into His kingdom. Then, when He returns, He will vanquish those who refuse allegiance to His Lordship. Therefore, God's kingdom is “theocratic and political”—He rules over all. Upon His return, He will rule, but without contest.
- The “kingdom of God” is barely mentioned in the middle of Acts, but these opening and closing chapters bring it to the fore. The purpose of the middle section of Acts, then, is to expound upon the nature of God's kingdom.
- God's kingdom can be broken down into three categories: God's power, God's people, and God's place. God's power speaks of His reign over all through Jesus. God's people speaks of those who call on His name, both Jews and Gentiles. God's place speaks not just of a plot of land in the Middle East but rather the whole earth.
- From the very beginning, God created man to rule the earth. The garden of Eden was a head start—but we failed to subdue creation, being subdued instead by the serpent. God's covenant with Israel provided another head start: not a garden, but a land flowing with milk and honey. But just as Adam failed, so did Israel. All have sinned and fallen short of God's glory—all except Jesus. Jesus is our better Adam and better Israel. Through Him, the “place” of the kingdom is Creation 2.0: a new heavens and new earth.

—“and trying to convince them about Jesus”: These twin themes—the kingdom of God and the story of Jesus—are two sides of the same coin. If the kingdom refers to God's power, God's people, and God's place, these realities come together in Jesus.

- *God's power:* Through Jesus, God exerts His powerful reign over Caesar and Herod and Felix and Festus; through Jesus, God reigns over shipwrecks, serpents, and death; through Jesus, God reigns over sickness and demons.
- *God's people:* Through Jesus, God establishes a new covenant with His people, both Jew and Gentile, who together constitute a "holy nation" to God.
- *God's place:* Through Jesus, God redeems the whole creation from futility and death, gradually winning back turf that the devil seized until He establishes Creation 2.0.

—"And some were convinced by what he said, but others disbelieved":

- The Jews did not universally reject the gospel. Revival broke out in Jerusalem on Pentecost, spreading even among the Levitical priesthood and into Judea. It multiplied also in Samaria, which represented the lost "northern tribes" of Israel.
- Nevertheless, Paul says in Romans 11 that a hardening had happened among most Jews. Like Pharaoh—who hardened his heart and then had it subsequently further hardened—most of the Jews became, ironically, like Pharaoh. God hardened most of their hearts as a judgment for hardening their own hearts. Paul will address this hardening in the text that follows.
- John Owen: "The most terrifying judgment of God in the world is the hardening of the hearts of men."
- I'm reminded of the idiom, "it's a slippery slope." To harden your heart, even once, is like stepping on a steep, icy cliff. You might get lucky. Your foot might remain stable. Perhaps you'll be able to retreat to a level path. But is it worth the risk? "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts..."
- Despite the widescale hardening of hearts that has taken place among the Jews, Gentiles must beware—Paul also warns about this in Romans 11. I feel tremendous concern for the anti-semitism I see in our nation. Some have justified it by pointing to their rejection of Christ. But we are no better than they. Outside of God's grace in Christ, we are all sold under sin. Thank God for His mercy! And pray for the Jews. One day, the gates of salvation will swing shut on the Gentiles. To the Jews, it will once again fling open. A Jewish revival is in our future.

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.'

—"they departed after Paul had made this one statement...": When Paul quotes the Jewish Scriptures as a testimony against his Jewish brothers—they turn on him. Like Paul, we must be willing to warn people about their hardness of heart and the judgment to come.

—"The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your fathers through Isaiah the prophet":

- The Scriptures are inspired by the Holy Spirit. Isaiah wrote the words; the Holy Spirit also wrote the words. When we read Scripture, we are not just reading the words of Isaiah, Daniel, Matthew, and Paul. We are reading the words of God.
- Paul aligns himself with Isaiah the prophet, quoting from Isaiah 6 in the section that follows. After seeing Jesus in the throne room, surrounded by seraphim, God commissioned Isaiah to prophesy against his hard-hearted brothers—as Paul does here. What the Holy Spirit spoke through Isaiah applied not just to the prophet's audience; it applied to Paul's audience. Jesus will quote the same Scripture against his own audience. Scripture is not limited in its application. What God spoke in specific contexts to unique audiences, He continues to speak to all people, everywhere.
- When God commissions Isaiah to preach hard truths, he asks the LORD, "How long shall I continue?" Then he hears this response: "Until cities lie waste without inhabitant, and houses without people, and the land is a desolate waste, and the LORD removes people far away, and the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land" (Isa. 6:11-12). In other words, Isaiah is to continue prophesying until the hard-hearted people suffer exile for refusing to listen.
- Isaiah's and Paul's experience with a hard-hearted audience forces us to reconsider our definition of success. Success is not large crowds and mass conversions; success is proclaiming the gospel faithfully.
- God doesn't hold us responsible for fruit; He holds us responsible for planting. He doesn't judge us based on outcomes; He judges us based on faithfulness.

—"You will indeed hear but never understand... see but never perceive... their eyes they have closed":

- The problem is not a failure to audibly hear the message—Paul has faithfully proclaimed it; their problem is not a failure to see the truth—Paul has presented Jesus before their eyes. Their problem is willful resistance. They closed their own eyes and ears to the truth that would have saved them.

- I am reminded of the reaction to Stephen's sermon. Before stoning him to death, we read, "But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together at him" (Acts 7:57). These men shut their physical ears with their hands because their spiritual ears couldn't bear the hearing of truth.
- God's heart is to "heal them," but first they must soften their hearts, open their eyes and ears, and turn to God.
- The emphasis of Isaiah 6, as well as in this passage, is that these Jews will not listen. This tees up the contrast with what follows, where Paul says the Gentiles "will listen" (28:28).

—This passage from Isaiah is quoted in multiple passages in the New Testament.

- In the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the accent lands on divine judgment. Jesus speaks in parables, both BECAUSE they are dull of heart and also IN ORDER TO harden their hearts further. In other words, His parables are mysterious because only the soft-hearted get the real download. Hard-hearted people will brush off the mystery, refuse to ponder it further, and God will in turn harden their hearts further.
- In the Gospel of John, the accent of judgment comes across even stronger. He quotes Isaiah as saying, "He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts."
- The repeated citation throughout the New Testament shows how its authors are explaining: why did so many Jewish people reject the hope of Israel? If the gospel truly is a fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets, shouldn't they have welcomed it?
- The answer is: this shouldn't be a surprise. Just like their fathers in the days of Isaiah, those who lived in the days of Jesus and Paul rejected God's voice.

28 Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen."

—"salvation of God":

- This is the same phrase we find in a different passage from the same prophet, Isaiah: "A voice of one crying out in the wilderness: Prepare the way for the Lord; make his paths straight! Every valley will be filled, and every mountain and hill will be made low; the crooked will become straight, the rough ways smooth, and everyone will see the salvation of God" (Isa. 40:3-5).
- These words, quoted in Luke 3:4-6—from, and about, John the Baptist—are fulfilled in the One John proclaimed: Jesus. Jesus is the "Lord" who makes every wrong thing right, opening the door to "everyone" (not just Jews) to see "the salvation of God."
- In other words, this same phrase—"salvation of God"—appears in a passage about Jesus opening the doors of salvation to Gentiles: the very topic of Paul's speech.

—"they will listen": The obstinance of these Jews should not discourage us. Acts ends on a hopeful note—the whole world "will listen" to the message of the gospel. This verse is a pivot toward the hope that follows in these closing verses.

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.

—"welcomed all who came to him": Paul is in prison, yet portrayed as a host. Like every host, he has something to offer—that's why they come. Paul offers them Jesus.

—"proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ":

- The kingdom of God and the Lord Jesus Christ are interrelated. "Christ" is not His last name; it means King ("Anointed One"). Jesus is the King of the Kingdom of God.
- "proclaiming... teaching":
 - "proclaiming" is more confrontational. It means to herald or announce like a royal messenger who enters a conquered city to announce to its residents: "There's a new king in town—surrender!" This is the essence of our Lord's preaching, when He said, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!"
 - "teaching" is more explanatory. It means to instruct or train. In context, Paul needed to explain from the Law and the Prophets that the historical Jesus of Nazareth is the One these Scriptures pointed to.
 - People need us to both herald the kingdom and explain its king. They need us to warn them boldly to surrender but also explain the way of salvation.

—"with all boldness and without hindrance":

- "boldness" means that Paul was not internally restrained by the fear of man.
- "without hindrance" means Paul was not externally restrained by coercion.
- Neither internal nor external forces constrained the spread of the gospel. The threat of death did not scare him, and the prison guards did not force his mouth shut.

- The last two words—"without hindrance"—summarize the entire Book of Acts. The exalted Lord Jesus cannot be hindered from His global, saving mission.

—These final two verses in Acts are as powerful for what they DON'T say as for what they DO. They tell us nothing about Paul's eventual release from prison, which definitely happened. They offer no detail about his testimony before Caesar. Nor do they recount any of the conversions—like that of Onesimus, the slave we read about in Philemon.

—Why doesn't Luke narrate these interesting outcomes? Since Acts 13, almost the whole story centers on Paul's mission and influence. Had Luke ended as we expected—as we wanted—we might have mistaken his narration as a story about Paul. But this is not the story of Paul's conversion, Paul's mission, or Paul's success. It is the story of the risen Christ, empowering His church by the Spirit to reach all nations.

—Not only does Luke omit these seemingly essential details about Paul's life; he ends the story on an apparent downer—Paul is in prison. But that's precisely the point. Paul is chained, but the gospel is not. The final two words of the story are: "without hindrance." Despite Paul's limited freedom, the gospel freely spreads. As Paul writes from this same Roman prison, "I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear" (Phil. 1:12-14).

—This has been the theme throughout Acts:

- Bewilderment over the baptism of the Spirit leads to Peter's proclamation and the salvation of well over three thousand people (2:1-47).
- Jewish opposition to Peter's preaching led to more preaching, a prayer meeting, and an outpouring of the Spirit for boldness and miracles (4:1-31).
- The hypocrisy of Ananias and Sapphira leads to divinely executed judgment, the fear of God, holiness in the church, and a healing revival (5:1-16).
- The apostles' imprisonment and beating lead to angelic release, bold preaching, and joy in suffering (5:17-42).
- Ethnic division in food distribution prompts the appointment of Spirit-filled leaders and further church expansion, even among the Jewish priests (6:1-7).
- This same ethnic division and its resultant appointment of deacons leads to opportunities for Stephen and Philip, who will spread the gospel in Jerusalem, Samaria, and Ethiopia (Acts 6:1-6; 6:8-7:60; 8:4-40).
- Stephen's martyrdom—and final prayer—leads to Paul's salvation (7:1-60; 9:1-22).
- Persecution in Jerusalem scattered disciples and church plants across Samaria and in Antioch (8:1-25; 9:31; 11:19-26).
- Saul's mission to incarcerate Christian leads to His encounter on the road (9:1-22)
- Dorcas's death results in resurrection and many salvations (9:36-43).
- The mission is threatened by Jerusalem's ethno-centrism, but God overcomes it through a series of visions, angelic appearances, divine whispers, and the baptism of the Spirit (10:1-11:18).
- A severe famine leads to cross-cultural generosity and unity (11:27-30)
- Peter's imprisonment leads to an angelic jail-break and an angelic execution of King Herod, which in turn causes the word to increase and multiply (ch. 12).
- A sorcerer's opposition in Cyprus leads to a power encounter and salvation (13:4-12).
- Jewish opposition in Pisidian Antioch opens the door of salvation for Gentiles (13:13-52).
- Danger in Iconium causes Paul and Barnabas to flee elsewhere, yielding more salvations in more cities (14:1-7).
- Paul is stoned in Lystra, but Jesus raises him back up and he appoints elders in the churches before hastening back to Jerusalem (14:8-26).
- False doctrine in the churches leads to gospel clarity and growth (15:1-35; 16:5).
- A sharp dispute between Paul and Barnabas results in two missionary teams and further multiplication (15:36-41).
- A door for ministry is slammed shut in Phrygia, Galatia, and Asia, but this opens a door in Macedonia (16:6-10).
- Paul and Silas are beaten and imprisoned, but the jailer gets saved along with his household, and the church in Philippi is born (ch. 16:16-40).
- Persecution in Thessalonica leads to proclamation in Berea (17:1-9).
- Persecution and separation in Berea leads to proclamation in Athens (17:10-34).
- Jewish opposition in Corinth opens the door of salvation for Gentiles and a church plant that he nurtured for eighteen months (18:1-17).

- Persecution in Corinth also resulted in legal protection that allowed the gospel to flourish in that city (18:12-17).
- An ethnic deportation of Jews from Rome led to a ministry partnership between Paul, Priscilla, and Aquila, which in turn resulted in doctrinal correction for Apollos, who in turn nurtured the church in Corinth and preached powerfully (ch. 18).
- Jewish opposition in Ephesus led Paul to preach in the lecture hall of Tyrannus where “all the residents heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks (19:1-10).
- A botched exorcism by some Jewish sorcerers resulted in multitudes of pagans burning their magic books and turning to Jesus (19:11-20).
- A riot in Ephesus caused Paul to flee to other cities throughout Macedonia, where he encouraged the disciples (19:21-20:2).
- Jewish opposition in Jerusalem caused Paul to spend Passover in Gentile lands, which resulted in Eutychus dying and being raised to life (20:1-16).
- Beatings, arrests, false imprisonments, delayed justice, a shipwreck, and a snakebite lead to gospel proclamation to Jewish leaders, Roman government officials (Festus, Felix), their family (Drusilla, Bernice), the isle of Malta, and implicitly, to Caesar himself (Acts 21-28).

—The story of Acts is not about Peter or Paul but about the exalted Lord Jesus who cannot be stopped. His throne is beyond the grasp of Caesar and Herod. His power is infinitely more than any earthquake, storm, or deadly viper. His holiness cannot be mocked by Ananias and Sapphira. His Word does not bow to the chanting mobs. If they kill God’s servants, the message still spreads. If they imprison God’s servants, the message still spreads. If natural disaster befalls them, the message still spreads. If they corrupt the message—God roots out corrupt people and their teachings—and then the message still spreads. No matter what they do, the message Christ’s global kingship will spread until every tribe hears (Matt. 24:14) and the King returns, to judge and redeem.