

The End of the Beginning Acts 28:17-31

Main Idea: The book of Acts concludes with Paul's ministry in Rome, but the mission continues today through God's people.

- I. Make the most of every ministry opportunity (28:17-23, 30-31; Phil 1:12-26)**
- II. Teach all people about King Jesus from the Scriptures (28:23-31)**
- III. Ask God to grant you Spirit-empowered boldness (28:31)**
- IV. Maintain an unshakable confidence in the Gospel (28:31)**
- V. Pour yourself out for the King until you see the King (28:30-31; 2 Tim 4:6-8, 17-18)**

The *conclusion* of a book or film always creates a buzz. I remember when the popular show *Lost* was nearing the very last episode of the series, everyone wanted to know, "How will it end?" Many weren't satisfied with the ending, while others liked it. It was a strange ending. What kind of endings to books/films do you like? Do you like happy endings? Do you want complete closure? Older shows used to always have a nice conclusion at the end of each episode, unless you arrived at the end to read the words, "to be continued..." which always led to a big "No!" Today, shows drag you along for multiple episodes before coming to some kind of conclusion. Some movies even allow you to "choose your own ending."

If you like complete closure, then you might be disappointed with the ending of Acts. Luke has taken us for quite a journey. His writing is remarkable, but his ending might appear surprising, and perhaps even a bit frustrating. We have been leading up to Paul's trial before Caesar, but nothing is said about it at the conclusion! And we end without even seeing what happened to Paul. Did he die? Did he live? Did he go on ministering? Did he make it to Spain? Can you imagine reading a novel and getting to an ending like this? You may write the publisher saying, "Hey! I'm missing a chapter! I need to know what happened to Paul!" All we have is a big "To be continued..." at the end of Acts.

Why the silence? We must remember one overarching truth: Luke didn't intend to write a biography of Paul. Luke purposed to describe the acts of the Lord Jesus by the Spirit. He set out to describe the unstoppable progress of the gospel. His first book, the gospel of Luke, he set out to describe, "all that Jesus began to do and teach until the day He was taken up" (Acts 1:1). The book of Acts, then, is about all that Jesus *continued* to do now that He has been taken up. The ministry of Jesus continued, by the Spirit, through the church. Luke has been tracking the ongoing ministry of Jesus. Luke leaves us with Paul preaching the mighty gospel of the kingdom in Rome. So, the King is the hero of Acts, not Paul nor anyone else. Luke concludes Acts on a note of victory, with the triumph of the King. This is a fitting conclusion.

In addition, we must also consider a practical application of Luke's ending. Luke's message ends up being something like this: "This book is finished, but the mission isn't." Christians get to enter the story! We get to be part of this ongoing mission. We get to participate in the next chapters of Acts! We get to join the drama of spreading the good news to the nations. God replaces the messengers, but the message and the mission are unchanging until the King returns.

As we consider Luke's ending of Acts, we can identify at least five applications for us as we seek to continue this mission.

Make the most of every ministry opportunity (Acts 28:17-23, 30-31; Phil 1:12-26)

Paul is bound to a prisoner, but he still has opportunity to minister. From verse 30, it seems that Paul lived at his own expense in a relaxed form of house arrest, able to welcome numerous visitors. He makes the most of the situation, by ministering to the Roman imperial guard (and by extension, those associated with the guards), by ministering to the Jews, and eventually then to all who would come to him. Paul isn't complaining; he's proclaiming.

We know of one person who was converted during Paul's house arrest in Rome, a runaway servant named Onesimus (I assume many more were also converted). Paul wrote a letter to Philemon encouraging him to be reconciled to Onesimus saying:

Accordingly, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do what is required, yet for love's sake I prefer to appeal to you—I, Paul, an old man and now a prisoner also for Christ Jesus—I appeal to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I became in my imprisonment.... So if you consider me your partner, receive him as you would receive me. If he has wronged you at all, or owes you anything, charge that to my account. (Philem 8-10, 17-18)

I'm sure Onesimus was grateful that Paul didn't quit ministering during his imprisonment. Somehow Onesimus was able to hear the apostle teach the gospel, and was gloriously converted.

Next, consider how Paul made the most of his opportunity with the imperial guard. Paul was under a lenient form of military custody, with only a soldier guarding him (28:16). This soldier would probably be relieved every few hours or so. As a result, Paul had a constant audience (especially if he was chained to Paul!). These guards had to be the most privileged guards in human history! Of course, they may not have viewed it this way. But they were able to hear the world's greatest evangelist-expositor in the history of the church. Perhaps some of them were converted.

You get the idea that Paul's witness impacted more than these particular soldiers that guarded him. It seems that his witness became the talk of the guards and the palace officials. Some estimate that there was as many as 9,000 Roman guards. It seems like Paul's message became known to many guards, officials, and even to pagans in the streets. In Philippians (written during this imprisonment), Paul mentions how the whole palace guard was hearing the good news, and how God was accomplishing His purposes through this imprisonment:

¹² I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, ¹³ so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. ¹⁴ And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.... ¹⁹ for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, ²⁰ as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. ²¹ For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. ²² If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. ²³ I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better (Phil 1:12-14; 19-23, ESV).

Many Romans were hearing the good news, and others were become bolder as a result of Paul's witness. God was at work in the situation. In writing of his situation to the Philippians, Paul also expressed the great theme of a Christian, "To live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Phil 1:21). Paul's perspective on death as "far better" also comes to mind as we read these final chapters in Acts,

and ponder Paul's eventual death. He was a man consumed with Jesus Christ. Let's follow Paul's example. Wherever the Lord has you, make Him known!

Next, Paul ministers to the Jews. As with previous incidents in Acts, the initial response of the Jews goes from openness to rejection, and then Paul then turns to the Gentiles. We observed this pattern in Pisidian Antioch (13:42-48); in Corinth (18:5-7); and in Ephesus (19:8-10). Paul's first of two encounters with the Jews comes at his own request. The second encounter comes after they request to hear more. Here's how Luke describes the first meeting:

After three days he called together the leaders of the Jews. When they had gathered he said to them: "Brothers, although I have done nothing against our people or the customs of our ancestors, I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans. After they examined me, they wanted to release me, since I had not committed a capital offense. Because the Jews objected, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar; it was not as though I had any accusation against my nation. For this reason I've asked to see you and speak to you. In fact, it is for the hope of Israel that I'm wearing this chain."

Then they said to him, "We haven't received any letters about you from Judea. None of the brothers has come and reported or spoken anything evil about you. But we would like to hear from you what you think. For concerning this sect, we are aware that it is spoken against everywhere." (28:17-22)

Paul essentially summarizes what we have already read in Acts 22-26, with really only one additional feature.

Paul tells them that first of all, that he's *innocent* (28:17-19a). Paul committed no crime. He did nothing wrong to the Jews nor did he violate their customs (17a). He was then handed over to the Romans (17b; cf., 21:33; Lk 9:44; 18:32; 24:7). He goes to say he was guilty of no crime deserving the death penalty, and that he could have been set free if not appealing to Caesar (28:18; cf., 23:29; 25:25; 26:31-32). This drama has been covered previously.

The *new point* is made in 28:19b. Paul adds that he had no charge to make against the Jews. He wants the Roman Jews to not only know of his innocence, but also to know that he has no desire for vengeance; he has no counter charges to bring against them.

With this clean slate in view, Paul goes on to discuss *the main subject* of his defense speeches; that is, it was because of the "the hope of Israel" that he was in chains (28:20). The real beef with the Jews had to do with Paul's claim that Jesus, the promised Messiah, rose from the dead (cf., 23:6; 24:15; 26:8, 23). Here we see Paul's persistent proclamation of the risen Christ.

The Jews respond to Paul in two ways. They first claim *ignorance* regarding Paul's trials (28:21). They received no letters nor heard any oral reports about Paul. This lack of awareness may be owing to (1) the fact that Paul and the crew traveled early in the season and got to Rome before any Jews from Palestine; or more likely, (2) the Judean leaders decided to back off, believing that the case had no chance in Rome.

The second response is an expression of *interest*. They say, "We would like to hear from you what you think" (22a). The Jews add a curious note about having no real understanding of Christianity, saying, "For concerning this sect, we are aware that it spoken against everywhere" (22b). How could they not know about Christianity? Not knowing about Paul's case was one thing, but knowing nothing about Christianity? There was a vibrant church in Rome. It seems likely that the Roman Jews were trying to keep their distance from Christians. The edict of Claudius (in which Jews were expelled from Rome due to an apparent disruption in a synagogue regarding Jesus, cf., Acts 18:2) happened about ten years earlier. The Jews began resettling in

Rome about four years after their expulsion (Gangel, 466). In their insecurity, the Jews may have tried to avoid connection with Christians, including Paul's case.

Whatever the case, this first meeting with Paul sets up the next meeting. The Jews want to hear more, and so Paul makes the most of his situation, by welcoming them and exalting Jesus from the Scriptures. That leads us to the next point.

Teach all people about King Jesus from the Scriptures (28:23-31)

As with his ministry in Pisidian Antioch, Paul's second meeting with the Jews was much larger (28:23; cf., 13:44). Luke then describes Paul's expositional ministry in Rome saying:

From dawn to dusk he expounded and witnessed about the kingdom of God. He tried to persuade them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets" (28:23).

Paul's expositional ministry didn't stop with the Jews. At the end of the chapter, Luke tells us that Paul taught all people about the King and the kingdom (28:30-31). From Paul's example, we're reminded of the necessity of making disciples by teaching everyone about the King and the kingdom from the Scriptures. Let's consider how Paul did it.

From dawn to dusk (23). Paul had some amazing preaching stamina! In Troas, he preached all night (Acts 20:7, 11). Here, he preached all day! This meeting wasn't a little quick, three-minute gospel presentation! Paul took his time in explaining the plan of God – and these were people who were familiar with the Scriptures.

We too must remember that unpacking the gospel to unbelievers – especially those in other religions or with no concept of a Christian worldview – may take considerable time. I was talking with a pastor-friend who ministers in a very diverse region of the States. We were talking about how much pre-evangelism has to happen today before we can even get to the call for repentance. We have to provide a framework for them to even understand the message of the Bible. We have to explain our assumptions because millions have no concept of basic Christian stories and principles; even highly educated people often know very little about the faith. So we must patiently teach.

From cover to cover (23). Luke tells us that Paul taught about Jesus in accordance with the Old Testament, showing Christ as the hero of the Scriptures. Here, Paul follows a familiar pattern of magnifying the Messiah through exposition. He has been doing this throughout the book of Acts, imitating the pattern set forth by Jesus on the Emmaus Road (Lk 24:27, 44-47).

The two main concepts addressed involved the "kingdom of God" and "Jesus." In verse 31, Luke highlights these two concepts again, showing how they summarized the heart of Paul's instruction.

We aren't told exactly what Paul said about the kingdom, but surely he described how Jesus was the long anticipated Ruler, the true and better David, whose kingdom has been inaugurated and will one day be consummated. He may have also contrasted the unending reign of Jesus with the kingdom of Caesar. Indeed, there's much he could have said about the kingdom. This massive theme runs through the Bible, and the Jewish people would have definitely been interested in Paul's take on it, as the disciples' question in Acts 1:6 illustrated.

As King, Jesus now reigns in the hearts of all who will come to Him. He reigns in the midst of His enemies. Local churches are outposts of His kingdom. The King's people are called to display the values and virtues of the King, giving the world a foretaste of the (consummated) kingdom to come. As the King's people we should "seek first His kingdom" (Matt 6:33), and we

should invite the world to bow the knee to the King in order to participate in His coming kingdom (cf., Lk 14:12-24). Paul cared about the kingdom because he cared about the King. And we will have on passion for the Kingdom if we don't have a passion for the King.

In teaching about the Lord Jesus, Paul would have set forth the birth, life, death, resurrection, ascension, the pouring out of the Spirit, and the anticipated return of the Messiah. He could have pointed to various Old Testament texts to show these aspects of Jesus' life and ministry.

Paul gives us an example of the Great Commission charge of making disciples of all nations "by teaching" (Matt 28:18-20). Patiently and faithfully teach the Word of Christ, and the Christ of the Word! Him we proclaim" Paul said to the Colossians (1:28). Let's never stop opening up the Scriptures, explaining the text, and showing people how Christ fits within the larger redemptive story. Take people to the Redeemer, who saves by grace, not by works.

From heart to heart (23-24). Paul was not giving a boring all-day lecture. Luke says that Paul was trying to "persuade" (*peitho*) or "convince" (ESV) the Jews (23). Paul says that some of these Jews were "convinced" (24; cf., 17:4). This may or may not mean that they were actually converted. I tend to believe that some were converted (cf., Acts 13:43; 19:8-9). But perhaps some were simply convinced of Paul's innocence, or convinced of Paul's coherent argument. Many people today are "convinced but not converted." They associate mental ascent with saving faith in Christ. After teaching the gospel to people, we must press on them the need to repent and embrace Christ in faith.

Whatever kind of "convincing" this was, a divided synagogue followed Paul's exposition. Those who weren't convinced expressed the same kind of hard-heartedness that we have observed throughout Acts. Fernando says, "There isn't much knew here. Luke underscores the tragedy of Jewish rejection of the gospel. What is new is Paul's use of a familiar text (Isa 6:9-10)" (Fernando, 625).

As we expound the gospel to others, we should remember that we're not merely trying to transfer information. We should seek to impress the truth of the gospel upon people's hearts, and call them to repentance. We should evangelize from heart to heart, seeking to persuade them to bow the knee to King Jesus (cf., 2 Cor 5:11).

From Jew to Gentile (25-28). Luke tells us that the Jews were "disagreeing among themselves" (25a) and they began to leave after Paul made one final statement based out of Isaiah 6:9-10.

The Holy Spirit correctly spoke through the prophet Isaiah to your ancestors when He said,

Go to these people and say:
You will listen and listen,
yet never understand;
and you will look and look,
yet never perceive.
For the hearts of these people
have grown callous,
their ears are hard of hearing,
and they have shut their eyes;
otherwise they might see with their eyes
and hear with their ears,
understand with their heart,
and be converted,
and I would heal them.

Therefore, let it be known to you that this saving work of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen!" (28:25b-28)

Paul's parting shot begins with an introductory comment, in which he says "the Holy Spirit" spoke "correctly" (He always speaks correctly!) to "your ancestors" (25b). Notice how Paul affirms the inspiration of Scripture in this statement regarding Isaiah. Throughout the book of Acts, biblical citations are introduced with references to the Spirit (cf., 1:16; 4:25). Notice also how Paul distances himself from the Jews, saying "your ancestors" rather than his initial statement, "brothers" (17). Paul's faith in Christ has separated him from the Jews, who rejected the Messiah, as Isaiah "correctly" said.

Paul cites Isaiah, who highlighted three organs of perception of the unrepentant Jews. He mentions *hearing*, *seeing*, and *the heart*. Isaiah said that they "listen and listen" but "never understand" (26a); their "ears are hard of hearing" (27b). They "look and look" yet "never perceive" (26b); and have "shut their eyes" (27c). Regarding the heart, they have grown "callous" (27a). If the people would actually act on what they saw and heard and understood from the heart, then they would be "converted" and "healed" (27d).

It's important to realize that the Word of God always has an effect on people. The same sun that melts the ice also hardens the clay. Either people are melted and moved by Jesus when they hear the Word; or they reject it, and become increasingly hard-hearted. You can't listen neutrally. We must warn unbelievers that they must respond positively to God's Word, or the Lord may give them what they want.

Isaiah's words were appropriate for this particular setting in Rome. The Roman Jews had heard the message, but were unresponsive to it. The concept of "hearing" appears throughout these meetings with the Roman Jews (cf., 28:22, 26-28). The last time Paul uses this verb in verse 28 he says that Gentiles will "listen" and respond appropriately to God's message of salvation.

Paul's words remind us of Jesus' emphasis on the proper hearing of God's Word, especially with his parable of the four soils in which he also quoted Isaiah 6 (cf., Mark 4:12; Matt 12:39-40; Lk 8:10). Interestingly, the Isa 6:9-10 quotation appears in various places in the New Testament (cf., Jn 12:39-40; Rom 11:8), always in contexts of unbelief and hardness of heart.

In Romans 11, Paul discusses the Jews' failure to hear the gospel (11:8; citing Isa 29:10/Deut 29:4) – a rejection that's something of a riddle. Paul suggests that the Jewish rejection may be temporary. During this temporary rejection, many Gentiles will believe, and in the end, in the mystery of God's purposes, there will be a great turning of Jews to Christ. But this debate about the future of the Jews continues to swirl. Here in Acts 28, Paul simply notes the tragedy of the Jewish rejection of Jesus. A message of salvation was foretold by Jewish prophets, fulfilled in a Jewish Messiah, preached by Jewish evangelists, but rejected by the Jews, but embraced by the Gentiles (Polhill, 544).

Initially, the conversion of Gentiles was the exception not the norm (i.e., Cornelius). The Jewish Christians wrestled with the inclusion of the Gentiles (Acts 15). But at the end of Acts, Jewish converts are the exception, and Gentile converts are the norm. God's kingdom encompasses the nations. Jewish evangelism must continue, but Christianity primarily involves Gentile converts.

Verse 28 is the third time in Acts, in which Paul turned to the Gentiles (cf. 13:46; 18:6). Paul's ministry among them has been very fruitful. So this reference to focusing attention on the Gentiles isn't new. The big question is this: Is Paul at this point turning from the Jews to Gentiles whether a final and definitive turn? (Ibid.). Is Paul finished with the Jews? Debates swirl. We might say, in one sense, "no." "All" were welcome to hear the message, including Jews (28:30).

Stott notes, “The most natural explanation of this is that the ‘all’ who came to see Paul included both [Jews and Gentiles]” (400). And all along some Jews had believed, though not in great number (28:24). We too must continue evangelizing our Jewish neighbors. But in another sense, we might say “yes.” It seems that Paul believed that “official Judaism,” the Jewish people as a whole, wouldn’t embrace Jesus (Polhill, 545) – at least not at this point in redemptive history; so Paul turns attention now mainly to the Gentiles.

We much teach the nations about the King Jesus from the Scriptures. To do this, we need the Spirit’s help.

Ask God to grant you Spirit-empowered Boldness (28:31)

We now come to Luke’s sudden ending.

Then he stayed two whole years in his own rented house. And he welcomed all who visited him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with full boldness and without hindrance (28:30-31).

The Romans weren’t in a hurry to deal with Paul, so during Paul’s house arrest, Paul could receive all kinds of visitors (30). Marshall notes that Paul rented his place “at his own expense” (ESV), probably by carrying out his trade (425).

Paul couldn’t go anywhere, but he was able to still live like a missionary since people would continue to visit him (Ibid). We picture Paul in this house, teaching the Scriptures day after day like he taught in the Hall of Tyrannus a few years earlier (19:9).

Additionally, during this time, Paul wrote four (prison) epistles: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. As we put the pieces of the puzzle together, using the epistles, we know of some of the people who visited him, like Tychicus, Onesimus, and Ephaphroditus.

When others arrived, Luke tells us once again that Paul’s *message* focused on the *kingdom of God* and the things concerning *the Lord Jesus Christ* (31). Paul’s communicated this message with Spirit-empowered “boldness”

Once again, we have an inspiring example of courageous evangelism. Throughout the book of Acts, this Spirit-produced courage has characterized faithful witnesses (cf., Acts 4:29-31). Luke wrote earlier, “When they observed the boldness of Peter and John and realized that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were amazed and recognized that they had been with Jesus” (Acts 4:13). Now at the end of the book, we see Paul speaking boldly. Let’s ask God to grant us this same type of boldness that we have read about in this narrative (cf., Eph 6:19-20).

Maintain an unshakable confidence in the Gospel (28:31)

Luke says that Paul continued to proclaim Jesus boldly and “without hindrance,” (*akolutos* 28:31). Apparently the Romans didn’t perceive Paul as being dangerous, and so they put no stumbling block in the way of his gospel proclamation. Luke must also be alluding to the unbound nature of the gospel; it triumphs over every worldly and spiritual barrier regardless of what might come of its messengers. Though Paul was chained, the Word of God wasn’t bound! (cf., 2 Tim 2:9). Consider how Luke has been tracking the triumph of the gospel:

- So the preaching about God flourished, the number of the disciples in Jerusalem multiplied greatly, and a large group of priests became obedient to the faith. (Acts 6:7)

- So the church throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace, being built up and walking in the fear of the Lord and in the encouragement of the Holy Spirit, and it increased in numbers (Acts 9:31)
- Then God's message flourished and multiplied. (12:24)
- So the churches were strengthened in the faith and increased in number daily. (16:5)
- In this way the Lord's message flourished and prevailed (19:20)

We may now add Acts 28:31 to the list of summary statements expressing the triumph of the word.

When you finish Acts, we should stop and marvel at the incredible spread of Christianity. Acts began in Jerusalem. It ends in Rome. We often assume that Jerusalem was the center of action in the ancient world, but it wasn't. It was important to the Jews, and it was the center of the Messianic hope. But the city itself was rather insignificant in many ways (Richards and O'Brien, *Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes*, kindle). It was on the eastern fringe of the Roman Empire. It was known for trouble, and for being the land route to the breadbasket of Egypt. Rome controlled the area, but the activities that took place didn't really occupy Roman interest (Ibid). Richards and O'Brien note the following about the humble beginnings and the explosive growth of the faith:

Pilate was more the main finance officer or tax collector than anything else. The events of Jesus' life, death and resurrection, so important for the Jews and Christians at the time, were marginal events in a nothing town on the edge of an empire with more important matters to consider. If we fail to recognize this, we can fail to recognize just how remarkable the rapid growth of the early church really was. For the first couple of centuries, Roman writers often referred to Christians as "Galileans," indicating how nominal and provincial they considered the early Jesus movement to be. (Ibid)

Yet, at the end of Acts, we see the beginnings of this worldwide movement, of a people worshipping the risen King from Nazareth. Marvel at God's mighty work, beginning in Jerusalem, spreading to Rome, and to the ends of the earth. But don't stop here. Have confidence in this message! Make the gospel known believing that God will change lives through it.

It's easy for us today to doubt the power of the gospel. People seem disinterested. Some mock the message of a crucified man from Nazareth. Kent Hughes notes that visitors in Rome can see a square of plaster cut from the wall of the barracks in the Palace of the Caesars (344). On this plaster is a sketch of human figure with the head of a donkey nailed to a cross. At the foot of the cross, is the sketch of a man kneeling before it. This sketch was intended to be a mockery of someone who converted to Christianity, possibly a converted Roman soldier. The inscription reads, "Alexamenos worships his God" (Ibid.). The gospel was foolish to some in Rome, but others found it to be the power of God (cf., 1 Cor 1:18; 2 Cor 2:16). In Philippians 4:22 Paul concluded saying "All the saints greet you, but especially those from Caesar's household." Even those from Caesar's household, embraced the message of the crucified King!

Let's not doubt the power of the gospel! Don't try to domesticate the gospel. If you empty the cross of its foolishness, you empty it of its power.

Pour yourself out for the King until you see the King (28:30-31; 2 Tim 4:6-8, 17-18)

From everything we read in these last chapters of Acts, from what we piece together from the epistles (e.g., Phil 1:12-26), and from what we read in church history (see Witherington, 792), it

seems that Paul was likely released (around A.D. 62-63), and resumed his ministry (a “fourth missionary journey”). In this shadowy period, Paul traveled to various places (Macedonia, Asia, and perhaps even to Spain); he visited his churches, and he wrote 1 Timothy and Titus before being rearrested. After this second arrest, prior to his martyrdom, he wrote 2 Timothy. Longenecker puts it together like this:

Accepting the Pastoral Epistles as genuine, we may believe that after Paul’s release from this Roman imprisonment he continued his evangelistic work in the eastern portion of the empire (at least in lands surrounding the Aegean Sea)—perhaps even fulfilling his long cherished desire to visit Spain (Rom. 15:23–24; cf. 1 Clement 5). And since 2 Timothy 4:16–18 speaks of an approaching second trial and a tone of resignation, we may conclude that Paul was rearrested about 67 and, according to tradition, beheaded at Rome by order of the Emperor Nero (Longenecker, 572).

In 2 Timothy, Paul’s last letter, he concluded with these moving words to Timothy:

For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time for my departure is close. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. There is reserved for me in the future the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me, but to all those who have loved His appearing....

At my first defense, no one stood by me, but everyone deserted me. May it not be counted against them. But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that the proclamation might be fully made through me and all the Gentiles might hear. So I was rescued from the lion’s mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil work and will bring me safely into His heavenly kingdom. To Him be the glory forever and ever! Amen. (2 Tim 4:6-8; 16-18)

Yes. The Lord brought Paul safely to Rome, and He eventually brought the war-torn apostle to His heavenly kingdom. And He will bring all who are His there as well.

Until we see the King, let us follow Paul’s model of pouring ourselves out in service to the kingdom. Keep fighting. Keep running. When you see Him, you won’t regret having served Jesus faithfully until your dying breath. We will be in the presence of the glorified Nazarene forever. He will be with us forever. We will be there with the saints from every tribe and tongue, including those, like Paul, who were slain for the sake of the name. We will see them – and we will see that this King who puts heads back on! And we will join a multitude of the redeemed, in singing praises to the One who is worthy of our lives. This mission is “to be continued...” until Jesus, the Author of Life, concludes it.

Reflect and Discuss

1. What’s your reaction to Luke’s ending of Acts?
2. Read Philippians 1:12-26 in light of Acts 28. What can we learn from Paul’s perspective on this imprisonment in Rome?
3. How did Paul make the most of his house arrest in Rome? What does his example teach us about making the most of every ministry opportunity that the Lord gives us?
4. Related to these questions, what does the conversion of Onesimus teach us? (Philem 8-16)
5. What do we learn about disciple making from Acts 28:23-31?
6. Why are often tempted to doubt the power of the gospel? What does this passage teach us about the triumph of the gospel?

7. Does Paul's vision of the heavenly kingdom in 2 Timothy 4:6-18 inspire you to greater faithfulness. Explain.
8. What might it look like for you speak with "boldness?" Do you have some people in mind who need to hear the gospel? Take a moment to pray for God to grant you boldness; and pray for them to respond to the good news in repentance and faith.
9. Looking over the whole book of Acts, what are your top three "take-aways?" What lessons have been most meaningful to you?
10. Take a few moments to pray for faithful evangelists who are taking the gospel to unreached people groups, as they continue this mission of making disciples among all nations.