

~ Lesson 92 ACTS ~

Ambassador in Chains

Acts 28:17-31

We are in chapter 28, and after a five-month voyage, God faithfully and providentially brings His Apostle to Rome. And last week we saw Paul travel on the Appian Way as God escorted His Ambassador in chains to the heart of the known world, the city of Rome. As he was heading down the Via Appia highway, there was probably a mass of Believers surrounding the long-awaited Apostle Paul. These Christians had met Paul as far as the Appi Forum and the Three Inns, and now they are following alongside Paul, leading him into the city like a royal procession of the Ambassador to the King of the Universe.

Now having arrived in Rome, Paul must await his trial to stand before Emperor Nero, having made his appeal to Caesar. By this point, Theophilus had received a quick briefing letter from Festus describing Paul's situation, with the promise of trial documents to be delivered shortly after. By the time Paul and Luke arrive in Rome, volume I of these trial documents, the Gospel of Luke, have already reached Rome, and Theophilus has probably familiarized himself with this statement.

We left off last week in verse 16 as Paul was brought to the Praetorian Guard by the centurion Julius, who we suspect became a Christian during these last five months, has now reached his destination and hands the prisoners to his commander. But because of the favor of God on Paul, a good word from Julius, and Paul's Roman citizenship, Paul is allowed to stay in his own rented house under military custody, chained to a Roman soldier, while the other prisoners are escorted off to the Praetorian barracks.

For the next three days, Paul is getting himself situated in Rome with the help of the other Christians in that city. Paul can't leave his house, so the Christian brethren are probably helping him, Aquila and Pricilla no doubt being there as one of the helping hands. In fact, Paul lists over 30 names in his salutation at the end of Romans who may have been there to help the Apostle Paul. After they arrive in Rome, Luke and Paul are probably arranging a meeting with Theophilus to discuss the completion of Luke's 2nd Volume of his trial documents, the book of Acts. They may have even started writing this during those three months on Malta. Now after three days in Rome, Paul is ready to meet the leaders of the Jewish synagogues. Let's start with verse 17...

Acts 28:17) And it came to pass after three days that Paul called the leaders of the Jews together...

These leaders are the τῶν Ἰουδαίων πρώτους, first-ranking Jews of the synagogues. There were between 11-13 known Hellenistic Jewish synagogues during this time in Rome. These synagogues were wealthy and had significant influence on the Hellenistic Jews of the world even though Claudius had banished them from Rome in 49ad, Acts 18:2. But since Nero became emperor in 54ad, he allowed the Jews back into Rome. And because of their position and wealth, they had a significant standing with the Jews in Jerusalem also.

So Paul, as was his custom, went to the Jew first and then to the Gentile. But because of his chains under house arrest, he couldn't go into the synagogue, so these leaders had to come to him. And he begins telling them the purpose of his visit...

Acts 28:17-20) ¹⁷ And it came to pass after three days that Paul called the leaders of the Jews together. So when they had come together, he said to them: "Men and brethren, though I have 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 who, when they had examined me, wanted to let me go, because there was no cause for putting me to death. ¹⁹ But when the Jews spoke against it, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar, not that I had anything of which to accuse my nation. ²⁰ For this reason therefore I have called for you, to see you and speak with you, because for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain."

It is estimated that 2 or 3 representatives from each synagogue came to meet Paul in his own house. So there could have been around 20-30 Jewish leaders listening to Paul, all with great influence. There has always been major opposition from the Jewish leaders toward Paul about his message of the Gospel, we have seen this in Paul's life through the book of Acts. But notice, Paul is not hostile in return, he never is.

He loves the Jewish people and has a heart for them to be saved, Romans 9:1-5; 10:1. And here in Rome was another opportunity to preach the Gospel and bring Jesus into the Jewish synagogues, not only to Rome, but throughout the known world through Rome. So Paul starts by giving them the reason for his coming, discrediting anything they may have heard and diffusing any presuppositions that may have developed toward him. And in doing this, he assures them he did not appeal to Caesar to accuse his nation, but rather he was compelled, constrained to do so, not having any other option for his safety. Unlike the Jews, who would jump at any opportunity to come before the Roman authorities, Acts 24:1-9; 25:1-7, and even Caesar himself to accuse those who oppose them, Josephus Antiquities Book 20.7.177, 182.

Paul assures them his motives are not malicious, but rather out of love to preach to them the good news of their Messiah. Paul goes on to prove to these Jewish leaders his innocence, having a good conscience toward them saying much the same thing that he said to the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem and to the Roman officials such as Lysias, Felix, Festus, and Agrippa. That there is no cause for him to be put to death, he is merely preaching the hope of Israel. And it is because of this hope that he is bound with this chain.

This hope is the premise to all of Paul's teachings and his writings, Romans 4:18; 5:2-5; 8:24; 12:12; 15:13; 1 Cor 9:10; 13:13; 2 Cor 3:12; Gal 5:5; Eph 1:18; 4:4; Phil 3:9-14; Col 1:5, 23, 27; 1 Thess 1:3; 4:13-18; 2 Thess 2:16; 1 Tim 1:1; 2 Tim 2:10-12; 4:8; Tit 2:13; Hebrews 3:6; 6:11, 18; 7:19; 10:23, 36-38; 11:13-16, 39, the hope of everlasting life with God. And since Paul came to Jerusalem, since chapter 23, Paul has been persecuted for preaching this hope. In chapter 23, Paul's defense before the Sanhedrin is very similar to what we see explained here in Rome, **Acts 23:1, 6**. Then again in Caesarea before Felix, **Acts 24:14-16**. Then two years later standing before Festus and Agrippa, **Acts 26:6-8, 22-23**. This is the hope of Israel; the hope that came through Israel; the hope of the Messiah, Jesus Christ and our resurrection with Him forever. This is our Blessed Hope, Titus 2:13.

After giving these Jewish leaders his defense, they respond in a very diplomatic way...

Acts 28:21-22) ²¹ Then they said to him, "We neither received letters from Judea concerning you, nor have any of the brethren who came reported or spoken any evil of you. ²² But we desire to hear from you what you think; for concerning this sect, we know that it is spoken against everywhere."

I personally believe this is just smooth talk and flattering words. It is unthinkable that these unbelieving Jews who want to kill Paul and will stop at nothing to do so, would keep quiet about Paul. I don't think so. Remember Tertullus' accusations against Paul, Acts 24:5- *For we have found this man a plague, a creator of dissension among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes.* Jewish elders were constantly coming and going from Jerusalem and I just think it would be very odd if nobody was talking about Paul. They admit they had heard about Christianity, and that is was a heresy, αἵρεσις, and it was spoken against everywhere. This was mainly the work of the Judaizers that would follow Paul and try to destroy what he had built. Paul even warns of these men in his letter to the **Romans 3:8; 16:17-18**. It is possible they don't want the confrontation because Paul is in protective custody of a Roman soldier, so they use flattering words to set up a later time to hear Paul speak.

Acts 28:23-24) ²³ So when they had appointed him a day, many came to him at his lodging, to whom he explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening. ²⁴ And some were persuaded by the things which were spoken, and some disbelieved.

These Jewish leaders went back to their synagogues and told the people about Paul. And on the appointed day, many came to his house. Luke doesn't give us a number of who came to hear Paul, but it was much more than just the original 20 or 30 at the first meeting. And within this group there were those who came with a humble heart and ears to hear, but others with a hard heart.

Luke says Paul **explained** (ἐξέτιθέτο- was laying out imperfect tense) **and solemnly testified** (διαμαρτυρούμενος- thoroughly testifying present tense), showing continual action from morning to evening. Just as Paul always did, he proved from the Scriptures, from the Law and the Prophets, that Jesus is the Christ. After hearing

the Word of Truth, they have a choice, humble or harden. Notice that some were persuaded and believed. How did they believe? Because they heard the words that were spoken and received them as words of Truth, Romans 10:17; John 1:12; 2 Thess 1:9. But others did not believe and rejected the Truth. Even after hearing the great Apostle Paul for 12 hours expound the Scriptures, they still did not believe. Not because God didn't effectually cause them to believe, but because they rejected the Truth so as to be saved, 2 Thess 1:9. The Gospel, the Truth of Jesus Christ, is the means by which God draws all peoples to Himself, John 6:44; 12:32.

There must have been many that day that did not believe because notice what happens next...

Acts 28:25-27) ²⁵ So when they did not agree among themselves, they departed after Paul had said one word:

Paul had been showing them Scripture all day from the Prophets, especially from Isaiah, and now at the end of the day after many had thoroughly rejected the Word, Paul quotes Isaiah again...

“The Holy Spirit spoke rightly through Isaiah the prophet to our fathers, ²⁶ saying, ‘Go to this people and say: ‘Hearing you will hear, and shall not understand; And seeing you will see, and not perceive; ²⁷ For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, And their eyes they have closed, Lest (μήποτε- otherwise) they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, Lest (μήποτε- otherwise) they should understand with their hearts and turn (ἐπιστρέφω- turn upon), So that I should heal them.’”

Paul is quoting Isaiah 6:9-10 exactly from the Septuagint LXX. He is speaking to Hellenistic Jews who knew and read their Scriptures in Greek. But even though Paul was a Hebrew of Hebrews, he still used a Greek Bible and quoted the LXX in his writings which then made those passages God-breathed. The LXX is an extremely reliable translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, one that I thoroughly enjoy. And in this case with Isaiah 6:9-10, when compared to the NKJV translation of the Masoretic Hebrew text, it seems to align better with God's way of handling those with a hard heart.

People are not born with a hard heart. It is our personal sin that separates us from God, but even then our sin doesn't make us incapable of choosing God. But over time, after continually rejecting and rebelling against the Truth, the heart will grow callous, thick and hard, *παχύνω*, Deut 32:15. This is the point Isaiah is making. Their hearts became dull over time. It became so fat and thick that the Word wouldn't enter in. They weren't born without the ability to see and hear God, but because of their constant rebellion, now they have ears hard of hearing and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise, they could have seen and heard the Truth and been healed. After this bold response, Paul ends with this statement...

Acts 28:28) **“Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!”**

Paul said something very similar on his first journey in Acts 13:44-47. For the last 12 hours, Paul had been preaching the kingdom of God and His plan of Redemption through Jesus Christ. And there is no doubt that part of his message was proving that salvation had come to the whole world, to the Jew and Gentile alike, and all who believe will be saved. So he tells them, this salvation has been sent... you had the chance to receive it, but now behold I turn to the Gentiles because they will hear it!

It was because of Israel's constant rejection, that they hardened their hearts, closed their eyes, and stopped their ears. Therefore, Paul tells us in Romans, blindness in part has happened to Israel and God has given them over to a spirit of stupor, Romans 11:7-10, 25. And in their process of rebellion, Salvation has gone to the Gentiles, which in turn might provoke them to jealousy and they would turn back to God, Romans 10:18-21. Jesus' arms are stretched out saying come to Me and I will heal you, Rev 3:20; Matt 11:28-30; 23:37-38. But they were not willing to come that they might be healed.

So Paul ends his day with this harsh word of Truth. In other circumstances, the Jews would retaliate and try to kill the Apostle Paul, but remember, Paul is in protective custody, and they can't touch him. So notice what they do in verse 29...

Acts 28:29) And when he had said these words, the Jews departed and had a great dispute among themselves.

Some did believe that day, but not many, and they left Paul and disputed among themselves about the things Paul had said.

Acts 28:30-31) ³⁰ Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, ³¹ preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him.

Over the course of the next two years, while Paul awaited his opportunity to stand before Nero, God would work mightily through Paul as the Gospel would continue to go out to the world from Rome. From Paul's rented house, guarded by Roman soldiers, he continued preaching Jesus to all who would hear. And notice God's favor through it all... he did this **with all confidence, no one forbidding him**.

This ends the book of Acts... but this ending is sort of abrupt and incomplete. But this I believe is by design. The Holy Spirit ended like this on purpose, because the book of Acts **ISN'T** finished. God is still moving and working through His Church. And even 2,000 years later God is still writing the book of Acts in heaven.

The book of Acts has been an enriching study to see how God used His Church to bring the Gospel from Jerusalem to Rome and to the ends of the earth. And by overlaying Paul's epistles during this study, we have been able to take the doctrinal teachings from Paul's epistles and see them played out in real life circumstances as we studied the book of Acts.

From this point, we will continue our study of the life of Paul. Because during these next two years while he is under house arrest in Rome, Paul writes 5 prison epistles: Hebrews, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. And then after his release he writes two pastoral epistles: Titus and 1 Timothy. And then finally Paul is arrested again and writes his final epistle to brother Timothy from a Roman dungeon awaiting his death. And we can use these eight epistles and gain great insight into the heart of Paul and what was happening in the early church during his time. So for the next eight weeks we will take a high level overview of each of his epistles and continue looking at the life of Paul.