

Commentary on Acts 28:16-31

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The **International Bible Lesson** (*Uniform Series*) for **August 29, 2010**, is from **Acts 28:16-25, 28-31**; however, to maintain the context, the commentary below is on **Acts 28:16-31**. Five **Questions for Discussion** follow the Bible Lesson Commentary. These are my preliminary verse by verse study notes before writing my Bible Lesson for *The Oklahoman* newspaper. They may help you in your class preparation and discussion. I do encourage you to write your own verse by verse notes and questions before reading the notes and questions below.

16 When we came into Rome, Paul was allowed to live by himself, with the soldier who was guarding him.

In this imprisonment, Paul was in a home that he had to provide for himself, not behind bars or in a dungeon but in house arrest. A guard stayed with Paul at all times, and probably restricted Paul's movements. This type of imprisonment may have been a courtesy, because Paul had no charges against him for breaking any Roman laws, and Paul was a Roman citizen. He was imprisoned because he appealed to the emperor to save himself from the Jews who had plotted to kill him in Jerusalem or on the road.

17 Three days later he called together the local leaders of the Jews. When they had assembled, he said to them, "Brothers, though I had done nothing against our people or the customs of our ancestors, yet I was arrested in Jerusalem and handed over to the Romans.

Paul tried beginning his ministry in a synagogue wherever he went. He continued this practice. Under house arrest, he wanted to state his case for Jesus the Messiah, and to the Jews in Rome he also wanted to tell them that he had done nothing deserving arrest and imprisonment. Paul implied that the local prejudice of leaders in Jerusalem had caused his arrest and necessitated his appeal to the emperor. Paul needed to make clear that he was a credible witness for Jesus and not a criminal whose testimony would be suspect.

18 When they had examined me, the Romans wanted to release me, because there was no reason for the death penalty in my case.

The Romans found that Paul had not broken any Roman laws. To them, the matter was a religious issue. The religious leaders wanted to kill Paul as they had killed Jesus. The death of Jesus was opposed by Pilate, but he relented under pressure from the religious leaders in Jerusalem. Paul faced a similar situation and appealed to the emperor. We do not need to needlessly die a martyr's death unless the Lord calls us to do so.

19 But when the Jews objected, I was compelled to appeal to the emperor — even though I had no charge to bring against my nation.

Paul was not accusing his people, the Jews, of breaking Roman law. Paul had appealed to the emperor to save his own life, for the Jewish leaders had plotted his assassination. In some sense, the guard with Paul was actually guarding Paul's life, or protecting him, from people who wanted to torture or kill Paul for his belief in Jesus. Even today in various places Christians suffer persecution in various degrees, even death in some places.

20 For this reason therefore I have asked to see you and speak with you, since it is for the sake of the hope of Israel that I am bound with this chain.”

After Paul said he did not justly deserve imprisonment or punishment, he told them that he had been mistreated by the leaders of the Jewish people because of “the hope of Israel.” These leaders actually opposed what God proposed to do through Jesus the Messiah. Their hope was that the Messiah would come and save them. He had come, but these leaders had rejected Him and the salvation He came to bring.

21 They replied, “We have received no letters from Judea about you, and none of the brothers coming here has reported or spoken anything evil about you.

Fortunately, the Jews in Jerusalem had not pursued Paul all the way to Rome, nor had they sent letters that warned of him and his “dangerous” influence. Perhaps they knew they had no real case against Paul that would stand up in a Roman court or before the emperor himself. Perhaps they were happy that Paul was no longer around to trouble them with his powerful preaching of the gospel and this threat of the gospel to their power over the people.

22 But we would like to hear from you what you think, for with regard to this sect we know that everywhere it is spoken against.”

These Jews respected Paul enough that they wanted to hear his side of the good news about Jesus. Paul obviously appeared to them as a highly trained Pharisee with good credentials, who had become a follower of Jesus. His testimony would interest them more than the testimony of less qualified people. Luke did not write all that Paul might have told them about himself, but in other places in the Book of Acts Paul did give his testimony, which he probably repeated to the Jews in Rome at this time, but Luke did not need to repeat Paul's testimony once again. Paul interested them enough that they wanted to hear more from him at a later date when more could be present.

23 After they had set a day to meet with him, they came to him at his lodgings in great numbers. From morning until evening he explained

the matter 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.

After the initial interview, probably with the leaders of the Jews in Rome, a great number gathered to hear Paul preach the gospel. Paul “explained;” he reached out to their minds; he did not say, “Just believe what I say, and don’t ask questions.” He reasoned with them as God invited when He said, “Come let us reason together” (Isaiah 1:18). They respected Paul enough to give him a hearing, and they listened all day! Notice! Paul appealed to the Bible to present his case, and not just to his personal experience with Jesus. The Bible must be our true guide to evaluate what we hear.

24 Some were convinced by what he had said, while others refused to believe.

Believing is a choice. Refusing to believe is a choice. As, and after, Paul taught, the Holy Spirit worked. Some evaluated Paul’s teaching honestly and convinced by the truth of what Paul taught, they believed in Jesus as their Lord and Savior. Others refused to believe in Jesus the Messiah after Paul had presented convincing arguments from their Scriptures (the Old Testament). No matter how persuasive we might be in our teaching, some will probably choose to disbelieve.

25 So they disagreed with each other; and as they were leaving, Paul made one further statement: “The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your ancestors through the prophet Isaiah,

The good news about Jesus brings division between two different groups of people as well as between individuals. Jesus declared that this would be the case, and the Book of Acts (and our own experience) proves Jesus correct. From the New Testament, we see how sharp the division was, for unbelievers stoned Stephen to death and wanted to kill Paul. Some unbelievers want to kill Christians today, and many cannot even speak in a civil tongue to true Christians.

26 ‘Go to this people and say, You will indeed listen, but never understand, and you will indeed look, but never perceive.

The Holy Spirit inspired the Old Testament prophets and writers to write the truth of what was actually said and what actually happened in history. What Isaiah said of their ancestors applied also to them. Because of their sinful, rebellious spirit, their commitment to live their way instead of God’s way (even though they prided themselves in obeying the law of God selectively, but not from a heart of love for God), they would not understand what they heard or saw from Jesus the Messiah or His Apostles when they preached the good news.

27 For this people’s heart has grown dull, and their ears are hard of hearing, and they have shut their eyes; so that they might not look

with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and understand with their heart and turn — and I would heal them.’

Because they preferred to live in their sins, they chose to shut their eyes to the truth and they refused to listen with their ears. They chose not to understand with their heart. They chose not to turn back to God. In spite of what the Bible taught about God's Messiah, they did not want to change their ways in order to be healed by God; that is, forgiven and cleansed from their sins. We all probably know of someone just as stubborn as these people.

28 Let it be known to you then that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen.”

Paul preached first to the Jews, perhaps because Jesus was the Jewish Messiah and both Jesus and he were Jews. It seems logical that is what Paul would do first. Every Jew who became a follower of Jesus the Messiah could then also help Paul reach out to others Jews as well as Gentiles. The Jews had the Bible and the historical background to believe, they “should” have been easier to convince than a Gentile. Paul told the Jews that the gospel of Jesus Christ was not just for them, but for all people. Others will listen to the gospel even if the Jews will not.

[Some later texts contain **29 And when he had said these words, the Jews departed, arguing vigorously among themselves.***]*

Perhaps some of the Jews had come to believe or were thinking of coming to believe and they left Paul with others who had come to strongly disbelieve (rather than leaving as two separated groups of believers and nonbelievers). The nonbelievers probably argued vigorously against those who had come to believe, while those who had come to believe probably argued vigorously in defense of their new faith in Jesus the Messiah. This verse brings a fitting conclusion to the day of preaching.

30 He lived there two whole years at his own expense and welcomed all who came to him,

Paul is a great example of finding a way to support oneself under the Lord's leading and with the Lord's provision while teaching or sharing the good news with others. Perhaps Paul made tents in his home and sold them from his home or in the market place. Paul showed hospitality to all who came to him, especially when his own movements were restricted by guards.

31 proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.

When Paul preached about the kingdom of God, he preached about a kingdom that is not of this world, as Jesus said to Pilate. He preached about the Lord Jesus Christ, who could have been a threat to the emperor, but he did so boldly and

without hindrance from either Jews or Roman leaders. “Christ” means “Messiah,” “the anointed one,” for Paul was now preaching to Gentiles more often than to Jews; therefore, Paul (and Luke) used the Greek language title (or word) for Messiah, “Christ.”

Five Questions for Discussion

1. What would you do if you had a captive audience, similar to a guard, as Paul did, and were under house arrest for a crime that you had not committed, but for your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ? What do you need to do to prepare yourself, if something like this should happen to you?
2. After all of the mistreatment Paul suffered from his fellow Jews, what attitude did Paul take toward them? How easy is it for people today to take the attitude that Paul took toward those who mistreat them? What can we do to try to maintain a Christ-like attitude toward others?
3. Why does the Bible show at least three different approaches to dealing with those who oppose God and the kingdom of God: the way of Jesus, the way of Stephen, and the way of Paul? [Tradition teaches that Paul was later martyred, but the Bible does not teach this.]
4. Why is the use of reason important in teaching the good news of Jesus? Why is giving an explanation for why you believe in Jesus important? Why is appealing to what the Bible teaches important when you speak to someone about Jesus and the good news?
5. Would you be willing to teach the Bible freely to others at your own expense? Sunday school teachers do this, as well as others. Paul also received support from various churches in his missionary work (see his *Letter to the Philippians*). What are the benefits of supporting pastors, preachers, teachers, evangelists, and others as they share the gospel in word and deed so they do not need to spend the major part of each day “tent making”?

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