

ACTS: I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH (PART 24)

Many scholars believe that Luke wrote the book of Acts as “evidence” for Paul’s eventual trial before Caesar Nero. That’s why he continually accumulates “official statements” to prove Paul was innocent.

Claudius Lysias to Antonius Felix:

Acts 23:29 Whom I perceived to be accused of questions of their law, but to have nothing laid to his charge worthy of death or of bonds.

Porcius Festus to King Agrippa:

Acts 25:25 But when I found that he had committed nothing worthy of death, and that he himself hath appealed to Augustus, I have determined to send him.

After Paul’s final trial:

Acts 26:31-32 And when they were gone aside, they talked between themselves, saying, This man doeth nothing worthy of death or of bonds. Then said Agrippa unto Festus, This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Caesar.

Paul’s appeal to Caesar is what finally allowed him to go to Rome!

Acts 27:1-8 And when it was determined that we should sail into Italy, they delivered Paul and certain other prisoners unto one named Julius, a centurion of Augustus' band. And entering into a ship of Adramyttium, we launched, meaning to sail by the coasts of Asia; one Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, being with us. And the next day we touched at Sidon. And Julius courteously entreated Paul, and gave him liberty to go unto his friends to refresh himself. And when we had launched from thence, we sailed under Cyprus, because the winds were contrary. And when we had sailed over the sea of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra, a city of Lycia. And there the centurion found a ship of Alexandria sailing into Italy; and he put us therein. And when we had sailed slowly many days, and scarce were come over against Cnidus, the wind not suffering us, we sailed under Crete, over against Salmone; And, hardly passing it, came unto a place which is called The fair havens; nigh whereunto was the city of Lasea.

Luke (“we”) and Aristarchus rejoined Paul for his voyage to Rome. Although there is no evidence that either of them had been arrested, they were allowed to accompany him, giving up their liberty and no doubt risking their lives to help him. Later, Paul would even refer to Aristarchus as his “fellow prisoner” in Colossians 4:10. Of course, Paul was not the only prisoner that Julius and his soldiers were taking to Rome.

The centurion Julius found a coastal ship leaving Caesarea, so they embarked and covered the eighty miles to Sidon in one day. In Sidon, Paul was permitted to visit his friends. From Sidon to Myra, the voyage became difficult because of the contrary winds. At Myra, Julius found a ship going to Italy; so he abandoned the slower coastal ship and put Paul and the others on board this large grain ship from Egypt that carried 276 passengers (Acts 27:37-38). The strong winds again hindered their progress so that “many days” were required to cover the remainder of the journey. The ship finally made it to a port called Fair Havens.

Acts 27:9-13 Now when much time was spent, and when sailing was now dangerous, because the fast was now already past, Paul admonished them, And said unto them, Sirs, I perceive that this voyage will be with hurt and much damage, not only of the lading and ship, but also of our lives. Nevertheless the centurion believed the master and the owner of the ship, more than those things which were spoken by Paul. And because the haven was not commodious to winter in, the more part advised to depart thence also, if by any means they might attain to Phenice, and there to winter; which is an haven of Crete, and lieth toward the south west and north west. And when the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained their purpose, loosing thence, they sailed close by Crete.

The centurion now had to decide whether to winter at Fair Havens or set sail and try to reach the port of Phenice on the southern coast of Crete, about forty miles away. Paul admonished them to stay in Fair Havens. They had already encountered adverse winds, and it was now the start of the stormy season. “The fast” (v. 9) refers to the Day of Atonement, which was in the Fall; every sailor knew that sailing was difficult during the Fall months, and impossible during the Winter months. Paul had already experienced three shipwrecks (2 Cor. 11:25), so he was certainly speaking from experience. However, Julius gave little value to Paul’s warning, and lived to regret it. Instead, he listened to the captain and owner of the ship who wanted to get to Phenice’s more sheltered harbor. They had already lost a lot of time (v. 9), the winds were favorable at the moment (v. 13), and after all, it was only forty miles away!

However, the “soft wind” soon became “tempestuous” (from the same root word as “typhoon.” Sailors called this kind of storm “Euroclydon” which means “a northeasterner.” It was impossible to steer the ship, so the crew simply had to let it drift – and the winds pushed it many miles off course. The crew did everything they could – they pulled in the small boat being towed behind, they wrapped ropes around the hull, they took down the sails, they threw their wheat cargo overboard, and finally they even started throwing the ships furnishings overboard. They couldn’t see the sun or stars to even determine their position, and their situation looked absolutely hopeless.

Acts 27:14-20 But not long after there arose against it a tempestuous wind, called Euroclydon. And when the ship was caught, and could not bear up into the wind, we let her drive. And running under a certain island which is called Claudia, we had much work to come by the boat: Which when they had taken up, they used helps, undergirding the ship; and, fearing lest they should fall into the quicksands, strake sail, and so were driven. And we being exceedingly tossed with a tempest, the next day they lightened the ship; And the third day we cast out with our own hands the tackling of the ship. And when neither sun nor stars in many days appeared, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope that we should be saved was then taken away.

Sometimes we get ourselves into storms for the same reasons:

- **Impatience**
- **accepting 'expert' advice that is contrary to God's will**
- **following the majority**
- **trusting 'ideal' conditions**

Acts 27:21-26 But after long abstinence Paul stood forth in the midst of them, and said, Sirs, ye should have hearkened unto me, and not have loosed from Crete, and to have gained this harm and loss. And now I exhort you to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but of the ship. For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, Saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee. Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me. Howbeit we must be cast upon a certain island.

Paul began this journey as a prisoner, and ended up as a leader! He took over when it became obvious that nobody else knew what to do. But Paul had a word from God! After two weeks adrift, the ship was now more than 500 miles off course, and they were still not out of danger. But God had given Paul a promise, and everything was going to be all right!

Acts 27:27-32 But when the fourteenth night was come, as we were driven up and down in Adria, about midnight the shipmen deemed that they drew near to some country; And sounded, and found it twenty fathoms: and when they had gone a little further, they sounded again, and found it fifteen fathoms. Then fearing lest we should have fallen upon rocks, they cast four anchors out of the stern, and wished for the day. And as the shipmen were about to flee out of the ship, when they had let down the boat into the sea, under colour as though they would have cast anchors out of the foreship, Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved. Then the soldiers cut off the ropes of the boat, and let her fall off.

At this point, the crew discovered that the water was getting shallower, indicating that land was near – and it appeared that the ship was headed straight for the rocks. In order to keep the prow headed toward the shore, they dropped four anchors from the stern. Some of the crew also tried to save themselves by fleeing in the small boat. However, Paul admonished the centurion that only those who stayed with the big ship would be saved, so they cut the smaller boat free before anyone could use it.

Acts 27:33-38 And while the day was coming on, Paul besought them all to take meat, saying, This day is the fourteenth day that ye have tarried and continued fasting, having taken nothing. Wherefore I pray you to take some meat: for this is for your health: for there shall not an hair fall from the head of any of you. And when he had thus spoken, he took bread, and gave thanks to God in presence of them all: and when he had broken it, he began to eat. Then were they all of good cheer, and they also took some meat. And we were in all in the ship two hundred threescore and sixteen souls. And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, and cast out the wheat into the sea.

In their final attempt to get the ship to land safely, they ate something to keep up their strength, then threw the remaining cargo overboard to make the ship as light as possible, and headed toward the shoreline. However, the ship ran aground and began to break apart.

Acts 27:39-44 And when it was day, they knew not the land: but they discovered a certain creek with a shore, into the which they were minded, if it were possible, to thrust in the ship. And when they had taken up the anchors, they committed themselves unto the sea, and loosed the rudder bands, and hoised up the mainsail to the wind, and made toward shore. And falling into a place where two seas met, they ran the ship aground; and the forepart stuck fast, and remained unmoveable, but the hinder part was broken with the violence of the waves. And the soldiers' counsel was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim out, and escape. But the centurion, willing to save Paul, kept them from their purpose; and commanded that they which could swim should cast themselves first into the sea, and get to land: And the rest, some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship. And so it came to pass, that they escaped all safe to land.

Even the worst storms in life cannot hinder the purposes of God. Although Paul's COMFORT was definitely affected by the decisions and the unbelief of others, his ultimate DESTINY remained unchanged. And in the middle of the storm, God used him as a witness to all those around him. In fact, all of the prisoners would have died at the hands of the soldiers, had it not been for the influence of Paul. So, just as Paul had prophesied, every soul on board was spared, and they washed up on the shores of the island of Malta.

Acts 28:1-10 And when they were escaped, then they knew that the island was called Melita. And the barbarous people shewed us no little kindness: for they kindled a fire, and received us every one, because of the present rain, and because of the cold. And when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks, and laid them on the fire, there came a viper out of the heat, and fastened on his hand. And when the barbarians saw the venomous beast hang on his hand, they said among themselves, No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live. And he shook off the beast into the fire, and felt no harm. Howbeit they looked when he should have swollen, or fallen down dead suddenly: but after they had looked a great while, and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds, and said that he was a god. In the same quarters were possessions of the chief man of the island, whose name was Publius; who received us, and lodged us three days courteously. And it came to pass, that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and of a bloody flux: to whom Paul entered in, and prayed, and laid his hands on him, and healed him. So when this was done, others also, which had diseases in the island, came, and were healed: Who also honoured us with many honours; and when we departed, they laded us with such things as were necessary.

To the Greeks, anybody who did not speak Greek was a "barbarian," but these island people proved to be kind and sympathetic. They were also superstitious, first believing that their gods had punished Paul by having a snake bite him, then believing him to be a god when he didn't fall dead. Over the next 3 months, the whole island experienced Paul's ministry.

Acts 28:11-16 And after three months we departed in a ship of Alexandria, which had wintered in the isle, whose sign was Castor and Pollux. And landing at Syracuse, we tarried there three days. And from thence we fetched a compass, and came to Rhegium: and after one day the south wind blew, and we came the next day to Puteoli: Where we found brethren, and were desired to tarry with them seven days: and so we went toward Rome. And from thence, when the brethren heard of us, they came to meet us as far as Appii forum, and The three taverns: whom when Paul saw, he thanked God, and took courage. And when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard: but Paul was suffered to dwell by himself with a soldier that kept him.

We don't know for sure if all 276 people boarded the Alexandrian ship, or just Julius and his prisoners. In Greek mythology, "Castor and Pollux" were the names of the twin sons of Zeus and were revered as the protectors of men on the sea. Many Roman ships bore their image. This time a "south wind" was exactly what the ship needed in order to make the voyage quickly and safely. Once they got to Puteoli, the centurion allowed Paul to stay with some believers for a week before continuing.

Somehow, word had gotten to the believers in Rome that Paul was coming. Julius and his party took the famous Appian Way and traveled 125 miles from Puteoli to Rome. One group of Christians met Paul at the Forum of Appius, and a second group met him at the Three Taverns, and Paul was greatly encouraged by their presence. While many of the prisoners were simply delivered to a common prison, because Paul was something of a "political prisoner" he was put under "house arrest" while he awaited his trial before Caesar Nero.

Acts 28:17-22 And it came to pass, that after three days Paul called the chief of the Jews together: and when they were come together, he said unto them, Men and brethren, though I have committed nothing against the people, or customs of our fathers, yet was I delivered prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans. Who, when they had examined me, would have let me go, because there was no cause of death in me. But when the Jews spake against it, I was constrained to appeal unto Caesar; not that I had ought to accuse my nation of. For this cause therefore have I called for you, to see you, and to speak with you: because that for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain. And they said unto him, We neither received letters out of Judaea concerning thee, neither any of the brethren that came shewed or spake any harm of thee. But we desire to hear of thee what thou thinkest: for as concerning this sect, we know that every where it is spoken against.

Paul called for the Jewish elders in Rome and explained that his appeal to Caesar was not an indictment against his nation, merely a defense against the false accusations made by some of the Jews in Jerusalem. They hadn't heard about Paul's troubles, but they had certainly heard about the new sect of people called "Christians." They wanted to know Paul's opinion, and arranged a time to have him address a larger group.

Acts 28:23-29 And when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into his lodging; to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening. And some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not. And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word, Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers, Saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive: For the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it. And when he had said these words, the Jews departed, and had great reasoning among themselves.

After an entire day explaining that Jesus was the fulfillment of everything written in the Law of Moses and the writings of the prophets, some of the Jews believed and some refused Paul's message. And that's when Paul quoted Isaiah's prophecy about the Jewish nation having dull ears, closed eyes, and unbelieving hearts. Because the Jews for the most part wouldn't receive their own Messiah, God was now sending His salvation message to the Gentiles – and Paul said, “they will hear it!”

Acts 28:30-31 And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him, Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him.

The book of Acts ends awkwardly and abruptly, because Paul is left under house arrest, guarded by soldiers, waiting again for more than two years for his case to be tried by Caesar. And we know from history that Nero will eventually have him beheaded. Certainly not a happy ending!

AKOLUTOS: In the Greek language, Acts ends with this single word. Biblical scholar I. Howard Marshall writes that “all the emphasis lies on that last phrase.” The word means “unhindered,” “unpreventable” and even “unstoppable.” It suggests a wide-open field of opportunity.

Let's get this straight – Paul is chained to a Roman soldier, forcibly confined to his lodgings, and has been awaiting trial for several years – and Luke writes that he is “unstoppable”? **Is this God's idea of irony?** Paul immobilized by Roman chains doesn't exactly seem like a promising strategy for accomplishing the mission of the church!

Unstoppable?! He can't even leave his house! And meanwhile, Christians are being martyred wholesale in the city by the Emperor Nero who is on one of his rampages. Paul will soon be included in the killings, beheaded for the name of Jesus. **Unstoppable?!** Many of the newer Bible translations pick up on this term by saying something like “no one tried to stop him.” But that is not the point – no one COULD stop Paul, because God was with him even though he was in chains!

Luke understands something that you need to understand. All of the judicial foot-dragging that has Paul mired in prison, the religious blindness that has caused the Jews to reject their own Messiah, even the massacres that are filling Rome's coliseums with Christian corpses ... none of these qualify as hindrances against the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Because the church in Acts was **UNSTOPPABLE**. You could fight those Christians, persecute them, throw them to the lions, burn them at the stake, fill the catacombs with their bones – but you could not stop them!

They were determined to turn the world upside down, and they did. They absolutely changed the world – and we are called to follow in their steps. We believe the same gospel, we preach the same message, we have the same commission and the same Holy Spirit as Peter, Paul, James, John, Barabbas, Silas, Timothy and the rest. We can do what they did! And so, “**UNSTOPPABLE**” stands as the last word on the subject!

Ephesians 6:20 For which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

Philippians 1:12-14 But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel; So that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places; And many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

“If Paul can live for God in prison, then I can live for God in my situation!”

In his final letter, written to his young protégé Timothy, Paul lets us know that he doesn't expect a miraculous deliverance this time ...

2 Timothy 4:6-8 For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.

However, years of trials, trouble and persecution have not soured Paul's attitude about the power of the gospel that he preaches ...

2 Timothy 2:9 Wherein I suffer trouble, as an evil doer, even unto bonds; but the word of God is not bound.

There is another reason that the book of Acts ends awkwardly and abruptly ... it's because the book of Acts is not supposed to have an ending! The church that God purchased with His own blood, the church that the gates of hell cannot prevail against, the church that began on the Day of Pentecost, has never been killed or even defeated.

Paul died, but the church didn't die. His story ends in Acts 28, but the church's story continues today, because WE are in the same church!

You and I are writing “ACTS 29” with our lives. Let's make it good!