

Introduction

1. We have seen throughout Paul's ministry that his pattern was to go to the Jews first and then to the gentiles:
 - a. When he arrived in a new city, if there was a synagogue there, he would begin there:
 - 1) He and Barnabas did this at Pisidian Antioch and Iconium
 - 2) He and Silas did this at Thessalonica and Berea
 - 3) He continued this pattern throughout Galatia and cities like Corinth and Ephesus
 - 4) These are just the cities Luke mentions, but he specifically stated in Acts 17:2 that this was Paul's pattern wherever he went
 - b. Generally, it was the opposition Paul faced from the Jews in the synagogues that became the catalyst for him turning to the Gentiles:
 - 1) This was also a pattern because Paul faced opposition in almost every synagogue in which he testified about Jesus
 - 2) On a couple of occasions, Paul even stated that it was their opposition that led him to turn to the Gentiles (READ Acts 13:44-47 & 18:5-6)
 - c. Part of this was no doubt Paul's love for his own people, but he also understood that the Jews held a special role in God's redemptive plan—it was through Israel that God would bring salvation to the world:
 - 1) This is reflected in what Paul wrote to the Romans:
 - a) Romans 1:16: **"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek."**
 - b) Romans 2:9-10: **"There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek, 10 but glory and honor and peace to everyone who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek."**
 - 2) It's also reflected in Acts 13:46 that we read just a moment ago where Paul told the Jews who had rejected the Gospel: **"It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you [Jews] first..."**
2. So, it's no surprise that Paul would repeat this pattern of going to the Jews first at Rome (READ 28:16-17a):
 - a. While in Rome, Paul was given a fair amount of freedom:
 - 1) He lived alone in his own rented quarters
 - 2) Only one guard was assigned to watch over him, and it appears he was chained to the guard which was common (see v. 20)
 - 3) He was allowed to have as many guests as would come to him
 - 4) As we will see in our study this morning, his house served as his primary place of ministry
 - b. As we should expect with Paul, we see that he didn't waste any time when he got to Rome:
 - 1) Within just three days, he sought out a meeting with who else? The Jews
 - 2) He called together **"all of the leading men of the Jews"**:

- a) Based on how this phrase is used elsewhere we know it's a reference to leading Jews within the community, but they were different than the elders, scribes, and priests (see Luke 19:47)
- b) It's interesting that Luke only mentions these leading men and not the more formal or official leaders found elsewhere:
 - It might be because there was no formal or official Jewish leadership in the city of Rome but rather a loose knit population of Jews (some estimate between 10,000 and 50,000 in a city of 4.5 million Gentiles)
 - When he began his reign in AD 41, Emperor Claudius blamed the Jews for the tension with Rome and banned Jews from holding meetings in their synagogues or face his wrath: **"Otherwise, I will by all means take vengeance on them as fomenters of which is a general plague infecting the whole world."** Letter of the Emperor Claudius to the Alexandrians)
 - A decade or so later he ordered the expulsion of Jews from the city of Rome; according to Roman historian Suetonius, it was because "the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus" (possibly a reference to Jesus Christ and the rising opposition to Christians among the Jews in much of the Roman empire)
 - Luke actually references this expulsion in Acts 18:2 as the reason Aquilla and Priscilla left Rome

A. Paul calls together the Jewish leaders and meets with them twice (28:17b-29)

1. In the first meeting, Paul explained his arrival in Rome, and made four claims (28:17b-22):
 - a. The first claim was that he had done nothing against his fellow Jews or their customs (READ 28:17cd):
 - 1) This was obviously a reference to the claims that had repeatedly been made about him by the Jews in Asia and Judea:
 - a) They spread false rumors about him (see Acts 21:19-21)
 - b) They made false accusations against him (see Acts 21:27-28)
 - c) They even brought false charges against him in a Roman court (see Acts 24:5-6)
 - 2) In spite of there being no truth to their claims, and Paul repeatedly denying them, the Jews still delivered Paul over to the Romans (17d)
 - b. The second claim was that he had done nothing against Rome (READ 28:18):
 - 1) The Jews had done their best to portray Paul as not just an enemy of Israel but an enemy of Rome; this is essentially what we when Paul was before Governor Festus in (READ Acts 25:7-8)
 - 2) However, every Roman official who examined Paul was convinced that he hadn't committed any crimes against Rome; this was true with the Roman commander in Jerusalem, Governors Felix and Festus, and even King Agrippa
 - 3) So, the Romans were willing to release Paul
 - c. The third claim was that he was forced to appeal to Caesar because the Jews objected to his release (READ 28:19):
 - 1) If you remember, Paul appealed to Caesar because he wasn't going to get a fair trial

- 2) Festus was trying to find a way to appease the Jews, just like Felix before him
 - 3) The only way for Paul to get a fair trial was to exercise his rights as a Roman citizen and appeal directly to Caesar
 - 4) Paul also stressed to these Jewish leaders in Rome that his intent was not to bring charges against **“his nation”** (likely referring to the leadership of Israel)
- d. The fourth claim got to the crux of the matter: he was a prisoner for one reason and one reason only—it was because of the hope of Israel (READ 28:20):
- 1) The hope of Israel was God’s promise of resurrection through Jesus and Paul repeated this theme throughout his arrest, trial and imprisonment:
 - a) When he was before the Sanhedrin in Acts 23, he proclaimed, **“Brethren, I am on trial for the hope and resurrection of the dead!”** (23:6)
 - b) When he was before Felix, he affirmed his belief in everything that was in accordance with the Law and the Prophets, including **“having a hope in God, which these men cherish themselves, that there shall certainly be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked”** (Acts 24:15)
 - c) He did the same when he was before King Agrippa (Acts 26:6-8): **“And now I am standing trial for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers; ⁷ the promise to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly serve God night and day. And for this hope, O King, I am being accused by Jews. ⁸ “Why is it considered incredible among you people if God does raise the dead?”**
 - 2) It was this hope that Paul desired to share with the Jewish leaders at Rome: **“For this reason therefore, I requested to see you and to speak with you...”** (20)
 - 3) Fortunately, these leaders hadn’t received any negative reports about Paul and were initially interested in hearing Paul’s views on Christianity (READ 28:21-22):
 - a) The sect to which they refer is obviously Christianity, and it’s not clear how much they knew about it except that **“it is spoken against everywhere”**
 - b) There were Christians in Rome, and at least a handful of well-established house churches, because Paul wrote to them on his third missionary journey (book of Romans)
 - c) However, it’s not known how big the population was; it was likely small, especially since Paul had such a great desire to go there to preach the Gospel
 - d) It’s also not clear how much these Jewish leaders knew about Paul’s involvement with Christianity; they may have known he was a Christian or they may have simply thought he’d have some thoughts on it having come from Judea and Asia where it had spread so widely
2. In the second meeting, Paul took the opportunity to preach the Gospel (READ 28:23-29):
- a. This time the Jewish leaders came in greater numbers and Paul spent the entire day laying out his case for Jesus:
 - 1) He did this by **“solemnly testifying about the kingdom of God and trying to persuade them concerning Jesus”**
 - 2) He did this by using the Word of God: **“from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets”**
 - 3) And, he did this **“from morning until evening”**

- b. The response from the Jewish leaders is found in v. 24 (READ): just like we've seen elsewhere in Acts, some had been persuaded by what Paul spoke, while others refused to believe
- c. Paul's final words to them came from the Prophet Isaiah and served as a warning (READ 28:26-28):
 - 1) In many respects, this reflects the history of Israel
 - 2) Throughout the OT they were a stiff-necked people constantly rebelling against God and hardening their hearts
 - 3) It was no different in the 1st century when God fulfilled his promise and sent Jesus to Israel and the world, and for many it is still no different today

****and this brings us to the end of Acts**

B. The last thing Luke records about Paul's journey to Rome is that he spent the final two years preaching the Gospel to all who would listen (READ 28:30-31)

- 1. The last thing we learn about Paul's journey to Rome is that he spent two full years living in his own rented house:
 - a. We learned back in v. 16 that when he arrived in Rome, he was allowed to stay by himself, but chained to a Roman guard
 - b. It is generally assumed that this was the case for the entire two years and that he was released after that, but it's not certain because Luke doesn't record anything about Paul's trial before Nero or when he was released—we just know he was released at some point
- 2. During these two years, we see him doing two things:
 - a. He **"was welcoming all who came to him"**:
 - 1) Generally, when Luke used this word for welcoming in Acts he used it in a way that reflects receiving someone eagerly or with gladness
 - 2) There's another important word in this phrase: **"all"**:
 - a) All implies both Jew and Gentile
 - b) Based on what Paul wrote to the Philippians, it appears these visitors included members of the Praetorian Guard (the elite soldiers that protected the Emperor) and even members of Emperor's own household (see Philippians 1:13; 4:22)
 - b. He was **"preaching the kingdom of God and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ"**:
 - 1) Trying to get your head around all the nuances and meanings of the phrase **"kingdom of God"** is a task:
 - a) However, one of the simplest definitions I've ever heard was from an old Old Testament scholar named Graeme Goldsworthy: "God's people in God's place under God's rule"
 - b) That might be a bit too simplistic so I would suggest: God actively reigning in human history in the past, present, and future, through Jesus Christ, for the purpose of redeeming mankind from sin and establishing the new heavens and new earth
 - 2) As Paul preached the kingdom of God, notice that he did so while teaching about Jesus—you cannot separate the two because there is no kingdom of God without the rule and reign of the Lord Jesus Christ

- 3) And all of this Paul this (as many translations render it): **“with boldness and without hinderance”**

Conclusion

A couple takeaways:

1. The first thing that comes to mind is how Acts records the beginning of the fulfillment of Jesus’s promise that He would build His Church and the gates of Hell would not prevail against it (Matthew 16:18):
 - a. This is exactly what we’ve seen in the book of Acts; it didn’t matter what God’s enemies—human or spiritual—did to attack the Church, they did not prevail
 - b. This is no less true today:
 - 1) In spite of the attacks against Him and His people, Jesus continues to build His Church today and nothing will prevail against it
 - 2) It might be hard to believe that at times with the ever-increasing persecution here and abroad, but “Facts is facts” (as they say) and when we look around the world we see the Church continue to grow, in some places by staggering numbers
 - c. It will also be no less true in the future: as long as Jesus tarries, He will continue to build His Church until He returns to take us home
 - d. May we be encouraged by that!
2. The second thing that comes to mind for me was how Paul, after all he endured as a result of his faith and commitment to Christ, remained steadfast in testifying about Jesus and fulfilling his mission:
 - a. We’ve talked about the incredible amount of suffering and abuse that Paul endured throughout his ministry for the sake of Christ; it was BRUTAL
 - b. Yet, he never lost hope nor the courage to fulfill the mission to which Christ called Him
 - c. The last thing we see him doing in Acts is sharing his faith while awaiting his trial before Nero
 - d. We don’t have much information about what happened to Paul after this:
 - 1) Church tradition holds that he was released around AD 62 and traveled to Spain just as he had hoped when he wrote Romans (Romans 15:24, 28)
 - 2) It’s believed that from there he may have gone to Crete and ministered alongside Titus, then to Ephesus where Timothy was serving, then possibly through Macedonia to Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea and Corinth
 - 3) Ultimately, he was arrested again and imprisoned at the notorious Mamertine prison before being martyred by beheading
 - 4) Shortly before his death, he wrote these words to Timothy (2 Timothy 4:6-18)
 - e. May we have the same kind of commitment, endurance, and confidence as we fulfill our mission