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Paul Keeps Spreading the Good News 28: 17-31

61 AD

Paul keeps spreading the Good News DIG: Why might Paul take the initiative to call this meeting with the Jewish leaders in Rome? How do Paul's statements in 23:6, 24:21, 26:8 and 28:20 illustrate what he means being a prisoner for the Lord (Ephesians 4:1; Philippians 1:13-14; Colossians 4:3; Philemon 1)? How does the existence of these prison letters demonstrate the way Paul made the best of his situation? In light of all Paul has been through, how do you think he felt when he heard the response of the Jews in verse 21? How is their attitude different from that of the Jews in Jerusalem? How do you account for that difference? Why didn't the Jews in Jerusalem pursue the case after it left their area? Verse 31 is similar to other summary verses in Acts (see 6:7, 9:31, 12:24, 16:5, 19:30, etc). What does this ending show about Luke's central point concerning the writing of this book?

REFLECT: How does verse 31 set the stage for the way your life should be a continuation of the book of Acts? In what way would you like to contribute to this movement of God during the next two years? Probably within a few years Paul was killed by the emperor Nero. How would verse 31 serve as a fitting epitaph on Paul's grave? What do you need to build into your life now, so that your faith in Christ will be what people remember about you at the time of your death? What bothers your unbelieving friends about the faith? How might you help them overcome those barriers?

This concluding passage of the book of **Acts** contains very important material for understanding the relationship between **Judaism** and Christianity, gospel and TaNaKh, **Messianic** and non-**Messianic Judaism**, **Jewish** and Gentile believers. The conclusion is that **Paul** had a very successful evangelistic ministry among the **Jewish** community of **Rome**, and that entire synagogues became **Messianic**. It is

one of the high points of **Messianic Jewish** history.



The message to Jewish leaders: It happened that after three days, Paul called together those who were the prominent Jewish leaders (Romans 1:16), many of whom **he** knew **(Romans 16)**. But **he** quickly discovered that **they** knew very little about the gospel **(28:21-22)**. Therefore, **Paul** saw this as an evangelistic opportunity. **Rome** possessed a significant **Jewish** presence, estimated to be from 40,000 to 50,000. The believers in the **Roman** congregation had apparently not done much to evangelize the **Jews** living in **Rome** (*Encyclopedia Judaica* 14:242), or they had tried but had been ineffective. Perhaps they wished to avoid the sort of persecution some of them might have already experienced in Yerushalayim when they came to faith at or shortly after **Shavu'ot (2:10)**, or after the martyrdom of **Stephen (8:1-3)**. **(28:17a).**[648]

Paul gathers together the leaders of the **Jewish** community and said to them very clearly: **Brothers, although I had done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers, I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans (Acts 28:17b).** Since **Paul's** statement to the **Jews** in **Rome** is true, it indicates that **he** remained faithful to the Torah and to **Jewish** customs and traditions throughout **his** entire lifetime. The fact that **he** continued to frequent the synagogue proves just how false the claims that **God** has rejected **Isra'el** and that **Paul** had rejected **his** own **people**.[649]

When they examined me, they wanted to release me because there was no basis for the death penalty. But when the Judean leaders protested releasing me, I was forced to appeal to Caesar – not that I had any charge to bring against my own nation, of which **Paul** still considered **himself** a

part**. For this reason, therefore, I have requested to see you and to speak with you – since it is for the [Messianic] hope of Isra'el that I am bearing this chain (28:18-20).** Rather than betraying **his** own **people, Paul** wanted to make it clear to **the prominent Jewish leaders** that **he** was on trial because **he** publicly expressed **his** trust in **the Messiah**, who is **the hope of Isra'el**.

They said to him, "We have received no official **letters from** the Sanhedrin in **Judea about you** (showing that the Sanhedrin knew their case was hopeless)**, and none of the Jewish brothers coming here has reported or spoken any evil about you** in this specific case**. But we think it appropriate to hear from you about what you think. For indeed, it is known to us that Messianic Judaism is spoken against everywhere" (28:21-22).** Those **Jewish** leaders were very open-minded, more so than today's usually are. The situation in **Rome** was different from the others described in the book of **Acts**, where very quickly the non-**Messianic Jewish** community took a hostile position against **the Messianics**. Somehow **the Roman** believers avoided such a clash with the non-**Messianic** synagogues, so that when **Paul** arrived they were willing to listen and not immediately reject **him** and **his** message.[650]

The Second Meeting: Evidently a more detailed discussion of **Paul's** practices and beliefs demanded more time. As a result, **the prominent Jewish leaders set a** whole **day to meet Paul and came to him at his quarters in large numbers. From morning until evening he was explaining everything to them, testifying about the kingdom of God and trying to persuade them about Yeshua from both the Torah of Moses and the Prophets (28:23). Paul** could use the Scriptures freely, since many of **his** audience probably knew them by heart. This was a **Jewish** audience and **Paul** had to explain in detail that since **Yeshua** was indeed **the Messiah**, why the Messianic Kingdom wasn't already set up! Surely this all day session in which large numbers of local **Jewish leaders** of the capital of the world who came to visit the world's leading evangelist in order to hear about **Messianic Judaism** must be unique in history.

Rather than presenting the gospel as something alien or superior to Judaism, **Paul** discussed a topic well known to his audience of **Jewish leaders – the Kingdom of God**. And his object was to expand their conception of it by his testimony. **Paul** must have spent hours explaining what the whole B'rit Chadashah teaches, namely, that at this point in history accepting **the Torah of Moses and the Prophets** implied accepting all of the Good News. **God's** active and present rule is expressed through **Messiahship** and Lordship of **Yeshua**, the salvation **He** brings to

humanity, and the improvement **He** brings to the inner lives and outward behavior of believers through the continuing work of **the Ruach ha-Kodesh**.[651]

Some were convinced by what he said, while others refused to believe. The gospel properly proclaimed always causes division **(Matthew 10:35-36; John 7:7:43).** Since those who were persuaded were leaders, they surely returned to their synagogues and communicated the gospel themselves; so that in due time, especially with **Paul's** continued teaching over the next **two years**, entire synagogues became **Messianic**. **So when they disagreed among themselves, they began leaving after Paul warned some who refused to believe, "The Ruach ha-Kodesh rightly spoke through Isaiah the prophet to your fathers" (28:24-25),** saying:

Go to these people and say,
"You will keep on hearing but will never understand;
you will keep looking, but will never see.
For the heart of this people has become dull,
their ears can barely hear,
and they have shut their eyes.
Otherwise they might see with their eyes,
hear with their ears,
and understand with their hearts.
Then they would turn back,
and I would heal them (28:26-27).

Like Pharaoh, who hardened his heart too often, **ADONAI** eventually seals and makes the hardening final, so that it becomes impossible for the person to repent. **Luke** quotes the TaNaKh almost always in a form either corresponding to the **LXX** or close to it, and not according to the Hebrew Masoretic Text. Here **Isaiah 6:9-10** is quoted verbatim from the **LXX**.[652]

Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen" (28:28)! From **1:8** we have seen that one purpose, perhaps the main purpose, of the book of **Acts** has been to show that the gospel would spread **to the ends of the earth** and permeate the Gentile nations. Some Christians have gone beyond this and claimed to see in the book of **Acts** the rejection of the gospel by **the Jews** so that **ADONAI** rejected **them** and turned to **the Gentiles**, who gladly received the message. It is a fact that **God's** truth and **His** promises became available to **the Gentiles** in a new way as a result of what

ADONAI did during the early years of the **Messianic** Community, as reported in the book of **Acts**. For it was decided that **the Gentiles** did not have to become **Jews** in order to become Christians **(10:1-11, 15:1-29** and **21:20-27)**. It is also a fact that **the Gentiles** believed in the gospel in substantial numbers. Nevertheless, as we have just seen, **Jews** continued accepting **Yeshua** as **Isra'el's Messiah** right up to the day that the words of this verse were spoken. **God** had not rejected **the Jewish people** as unworthy of the gospel **(Romans 11:1)**.

Some argue that the destruction of **Yerushalayim** in 70 AD closed the age of **God's** favor with **the Jews** and that **Rome**, **the Gentile** capital of the world, was to be the new center for conveying the truth of **ADONAI**. But **Tziyon** has never ceased to be **the holy City: A beautiful height – the joy of the whole earth – is Mount Tziyon (Psalm 48:2),** the center of three monotheistic religions. Now, after being **trampled down by the Gentiles** for coming on 2,000 years, it is at last once more in the hands of **the Jewish people** (since 1967); and with the apparent fulfillment of **Yeshua's** prophecy concerning this (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ, to see link click JI – Jerusalem Will Be Trampled Until the Times of the Gentiles**), it should be clear to all that **ADONAI** is continuing to favor **the Jewish people**.

The proper perspective is this: the gospel was to move out from **Jerusalem and the Jews,** to **the Gentiles and the ends of the earth**, that is, to **Rome** and beyond. This was a new work of **Ha'Shem,** though not without past history, since **Jews** had been making proselytes for centuries **(Esther 8:17; Matthew 23:15)**. **It was not that the Jews were rejected, but that the Gentiles were accepted.** This message shocked many **Jews**, and some **Jews** today still look down on Christianity as an "easy religion" not worthy of **Jewish** acceptance. This is why it was necessary to have the longest book in the New Covenant deal with the question; and the answer of the book of **Acts** is that despite **Jewish** resistance, **ADONAI** is bringing **His** truth to **the Gentiles** and **they** are being included in **the people of God** without converting to Judaism. **Yet the Jews are no less God's people – as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs, for God's gifts and His call are irrevocable (Romans 11:28b-29).**[653]

Verse 29 is not in the best documents and adds nothing.

A closer look: Did Paul witness before Caesar? While being held in custody in Caesarea, **Paul** appealed to have **his** court case heard by **Caesar himself**, as was

his right as a **Roman** citizen **(25:12)**. Then, on **his** way to **Rome**, **an angel** said to **Paul, "Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar. And behold, God has granted you all those who sail with you" (27:24).** So we know **Paul** must have stood before **Caesar**, although the actual record of it is not found in the Bible. It was prophesied that **he** would preach **before the Gentiles and kings (9:15)**, and so **his** appearance before **Caesar** was a fulfilment of this prophecy. Later, when writing to **the Philippians** from **Rome**, **Paul** wrote: **All the kedoshim greet you, especially those of Caesar's household (Philippians 4:22).** So it seems **he** had made friends with those in **the household of Caesar** while waiting for **his** case to be heard. The emperor at the time was the tyrannical Nero, although he was actually relatively sane at this stage of his reign. **The empress Poppaea may have influenced him as, according to Josephus, she was "a worshipper of the true God" and probably favorably disposed to Christians.** About 200 years later, Eusebius recorded that "after defending himself successfully, it is currently reported that **the Apostle** again went forth to proclaim the gospel, and afterwards came to **Rome** a second time, and was martyred under Nero" (Eusebius, Historia Ecclesiastica 2.22). There are also many other early church writings which say he was released and embarked on new missionary journals (notably to Spain (Meinardus, 1978).[654]



A summary statement of Paul's ministry in Rome: Paul remained two whole years (which was the length of time that accusers had under **Roman** law to come to **Rome** and make their accusation. If they failed to show up **Paul** would be released by default) **in his own rented quarters (Philippians 1:12-14),** but **he** was not idle writing four of **his** letters **(Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians** and

Philemon), and continued to welcome all who came to him – proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Yeshua the Messiah with all boldness and without hindrance (28:30-31). The perfect way to end the book, whose purpose is secondarily historical and primarily inspirational. Even though under house arrest awaiting trial, **Paul** was free for the one thing that gave meaning to **his** life, proclaiming the gospel. By **his** life as well as **his** words **he** showed **the Messiah** within **him. He** always went to **the Jew first (Romans 1:16)** and was also **a light to the Gentiles (Isaiah 49:6).**[655]

Paul was released in late **62 AD** before the time of the fire in **Rome** (July 64 AD), which also means it was before the time when Nero descended into tyranny and was looking for scapegoats, and thus before Christianity had really come under close imperial scrutiny. Nevertheless, the **Acts** of the apostles have long ago finished. But the acts of the believers in **Jesus Christ** will continue until the end of the world, and their words will spread **to the end of the earth (1:8).**[656]