

The following is a rough transcript, not in its final form and may be updated.

## An Open Ending

### Acts 28:11-31

**Intro: 11-16** – After spending 3 months on Malta, gathering strength and waiting for winter to end, Paul, Luke and Aristarchus finally begin the last leg of their journey to Rome. From Malta, they first landed at Syracuse, capital city of the island of Sicily. From there, they made their way up the western coast of the Italian peninsula stopping in Rhegium and eventually disembarking at Puteoli where they found some believers and stayed with them for a week. After 7 days, they made their way overland to Rome (125 ml) and as they moved towards the city, they were please to find believers from Rome traveling out to meet them. Word had somehow gotten to Rome that Paul was coming so the churches sent delegations to greet the Apostle. Some traveled to the Three Taverns (33 ml) and some to the Appii Forum (43 ml). They honored Paul by greeting him as the emperors were greeted when they arrived at Rome.

The fact that there were already Christians in Rome shows that churches could be established without an apostle. Not only were there Christians in Rome, they were there in considerable numbers and had been there for some time. There were Jews and Jewish proselytes from Rome present at Peter's first sermon on Pentecost those many years before (2:10) so it is quite probable there had been Christians in Rome from the very beginning. These Christians already knew Paul because they had received his famous letter to them just a few years before. So, it wasn't just that Paul's reputation as an apostle had preceded his arrival, but his love and concern for their spiritual well-being. Thus, they certainly wanted to honor him and in light of their display of love, Paul thanked God and took courage. Clearly, this greeting of these Christians from Rome meant a great deal to Paul.

By the time Paul arrived in Rome, the city had already existed for almost 800 years. The famous Coliseum was not yet built but the most prominent buildings would be the temple of Jupiter, the palaces of Caesar and the temple to Mars (god of war). At that time, Rome had a population of about 2 million – a million free citizens, a million slaves. Roman society was divided into roughly 3 categories: a small upper class, a large class of poor, and slaves. This societal division was not exclusive to Rome. It existed in nearly

every large city in the Empire and established a sort of pecking order that was accepted and unquestioned everywhere in that culture – except the church! It was the gospel of Jesus Christ that not only broke down the wall of separation between man and God but between men too!

Arriving in Rome wasn't just a happy moment for Paul; it was a happy moment of relief as well for Julius, the Roman commander. He had finally fulfilled his duty and successfully delivered all the prisoners entrusted into his care from Caesarea to Rome – with a lot of help from the Apostle Paul. Paul wasn't placed in a normal prison but was allowed to dwell by himself in his own rented house (30) that he paid for himself. But, as a prisoner awaiting trial, he was still chained to a guard around the clock. Sure, Paul was a prisoner but he had a truly captive audience all the time. In his letter to the Philippians, Paul tells them the message of the gospel had reached all the way up to the palace guards of Rome. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to see how that happened!

**17-22** – The final scene in Acts actually describes 2 meetings that Paul had with the Jews. Paul's greatest concern was his witness to the Jews in Rome. When you read his letter to the Romans, it seems as if the Jews in Rome had misunderstood some of his teaching. So, following his normal practice of going to the Jews first in every city he evangelized, it took him only 3 days to set up a meeting with the Jewish leaders there. In his first meeting, Paul wanted to explain to them why he was in Rome, what he had been charged with and why the accusations were false.

Paul addressed three main points in his meeting with these leaders. 1) He wasn't guilty of any crimes against Israel (17). Paul wanted this to be clear. Yes, charges had been brought against him by the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem, but he wasn't guilty of those or any other offenses. 2) Romans had been ready to release him and actually wanted to release him (18). He's referring to what the Romans would've considered to be a crime. He's making 2 points. He'd done nothing against his people and he'd done nothing to offend the Romans who would've released him if not for the objections of the Jewish leaders. 3) He hadn't brought a counter suit against the Jewish leaders (19). That's a standard legal maneuver today. If somebody sues you, you counter sue immediately to show that they are the guilty ones, not you. Paul didn't do this. He hadn't brought any charges against his own people. In Paul's mind, he wasn't a prisoner because of his

nation but on behalf of it – for the hope of Israel!

The response of the Jewish leaders was somewhat surprising - they hadn't heard anything from Jerusalem about Paul or his case. This is hard to believe, but they had no reason to lie. Maybe the Jerusalem authorities believed that their case against a Roman citizen was hopeless and that Paul would probably be released from custody in Rome. Maybe they were just happy he was out of their hair. Whatever the reason, the Jewish leaders in Rome didn't have the first clue about Paul's case.

But, they had heard some rather disparaging things about this Nazarene sect. and it seems that they sincerely wanted Paul's opinion on the matter. So, not being one to turn down an open invitation to share the gospel with a group of unbelievers, Paul suggests that gather a group of interested individuals and pick another day for them to get together so he could explain his teaching and they agreed to do so. These men were serious and responsible spiritual leaders. They recognized it was their duty to hear, examine, and make a judgment about Christianity. They gave proof of their sincerity by fixing a date for the larger meeting.

**23-29** – On the appointed day, many more people came for this second meeting. The leaders would have been there along with other interested members of the various synagogues in the city. They came because they wanted to understand what the big deal was about this new Nazarene sect and Paul didn't disappoint! He preached the gospel to them and he did it all day long, from morning till evening! This wouldn't have been a monologue; Paul would have presented his Christian doctrine from the OT and then be questioned by the rabbis, who knew the OT well. They would have challenged and pursued all of Paul's points as only rabbis can do. This went on all day long.

Oh, to be a fly on the wall in that room on that day. But, although Luke doesn't record what was said there, it's not too difficult to surmise what may have been said since Paul's letter to the Romans was written to explain the gospel to these very people. It's logical that he would've followed the general outline of that Book in his presentation. He may have opened up by speaking of man's obligation to know God and worship Him, to love Him with all one's heart, mind, soul, and strength. This was a point of contact with the Jews because it's what the OT teaches.

Paul would also have mentioned how we've all fallen short of God's standard and he would've explained why. "Gentiles have rejected the knowledge of God, but we Jews have missed it, too. We've substituted our own righteousness for God's righteousness, forgetting about faith and trust. We've substituted ceremonies for a heart relationship with God." If Paul's listeners had any spiritual sensitivity at all, they may have acknowledged that what Paul had said was true. Who is not aware of a coldness of the heart toward Almighty God? We know we should love him, but we often don't. We find barriers between us and God. Even our prayers seem to go unheard. Many of these Jews may have quietly acknowledged this to themselves.

Paul may have continued by saying, "So you see, it is not a question of being a Jew or a Gentile. We're all sinners. 'There's no one righteous, not even one; there's no one who understands, no one who seeks God'" ([Rom 3:10-11](#)). Those words are not only in Romans; they're actually found twice in Psalms ([Ps 14:3](#); [53:3](#)). His audience would've known these texts and the words would have echoed in their hearts.

Then Paul went on to talk about Jesus, the true hope of Israel, saying that the Messiah has come. This is where he would've gotten pushback. "Sure, we're expecting the Messiah but it's not this despised Nazarene." Paul would've gone to the many OT prophecies about the Messiah and would've shown how Jesus fulfilled all these prophecies. The Jews were looking for a day when God would reestablish Israel as the dominant, chosen nation on earth. But, Paul would've shown that before that happened it was necessary for the Messiah to sacrifice Himself to provide salvation for all people. Paul would have taught what Jesus taught, that through Him, God brought a spiritual kingdom to earth that would need to take root in men's hearts before it took over the governments of the world.

At this point the Jews began to disagree among themselves ([25](#)) because most Jews of that day were looking for a physical, political kingdom, not a spiritual kingdom. Some of those present believed Paul, being convinced by his clear, scriptural reasoning. Most didn't. Some believed and trusted Jesus; others disbelieved. This goes to show that even the best teaching from the greatest apostle in the best of circumstances wasn't enough to persuade them. It's here that the believing and the disbelieving Jews began

arguing amongst themselves. The negative reaction was so strong that Paul was led to cite a passage from [Isaiah \(6:9-10\)](#).

These words of Isaiah were a prophecy of the hardness of the Jewish people's hearts and as such, it described the tragic spiritual condition of most of Paul's listeners on that day. Its one thing to listen but it's quite another thing to actually hear. There's a tremendous difference between seeing and perceiving. Essentially, Paul's saying that if you reject Jesus, you can hear but you'll never understand; you can see but you'll never perceive. Your heart is and will be hard, your eyes shut, your ears closed because you really don't want to turn to God and be healed of your sin. This was true in Isaiah's day, in Jesus' day, in Paul's day and it's true in our day as well.

Now, if anybody should have possessed spiritual understanding, it was these Jewish leaders but their hearts were dull and hard. Too often, those who enjoy the most spiritual privileges are not really prepared when they must make a spiritual decision. Their stubborn rejection forced Paul to leave them with a final parting retort ([28](#)). Of course, Paul was accustomed to this response and had said the very same thing. 3 times before, stubborn Jewish opposition has led Paul to turn to the Gentiles—in Pisidian Antioch ([13:46](#)), in Corinth ([18:6](#)), and in Ephesus ([19:8, 9](#)). Now for the fourth time, in the world's capital city, he does it again.

Certainly, Paul was happy that some received the gospel message but he was no doubt distressed that even one of them rejected Jesus. But the truth is, if some of them rejected the salvation of God, it didn't make that salvation of no effect. It just meant that God would find those who would hear it – in this case, the Gentiles! As such, a preacher of the gospel really preaches 2 messages. To those who respond to the gospel message with faith, he is a messenger of life. But to those who reject Jesus, the preacher adds to their condemnation ([II Cor 2:15-16](#)). The scent of incense being burnt to the gods in a Roman triumphal parade smelled wonderful to a Roman. The very same scent was a bad aroma to a captive prisoner of war in the same parade who was about to be executed or sold into slavery. The only difference was a matter of perspective, of position – of being on the victorious side. Jesus has won the victory over sin death and hell and you get to pick which side you're going to be on!

Paul's parting words were as compelling as his day-long bible study because as they departed, the Jews argued even more!

**30-31** – After all Paul had gone through for the sake of the gospel, after all he was still going through, Luke tells us that he continued for 2 years preaching and teaching with all confidence! Nothing that happened to him had damped his spirit or quenched the fire that burned in his heart for the lost: not the rejection, the opposition or the persecution. He continued to faithfully and confidently execute the terms of his calling with all of his might.

What happened to Paul after those 2 years? Historians are divided. The general opinion today is that Paul was released after 2 years. Paul may have traveled to other places. The last books he wrote were the Pastoral Epistles; 2 Timothy especially, and he seems to refer to things in those books that may not have happened in the time frame presented in Acts. He may have traveled west, maybe even into Spain. He seems to have gone to Crete. Church tradition says Paul returned to Rome after the great fire of A.D. 64. There was such an outcry from the people over this fire that Nero blamed it on the Christians. Eusebius says that Paul came back shortly after that, in a time of hostility toward Christians, was arrested, and eventually was martyred.

The Book of Acts is a remarkable book but at first glance, it seems to have a flat ending, sort of anti-climatic. Have you ever read a book that ended like this one does? It's been mainly concerned with the ministry of the apostle Paul: his trials, persecutions, successes, and imprisonment. But then, at the very end, when we're expecting to learn how it all turned out, the story of Paul's life is abandoned and all we read is that he preached and taught for 2 years!

As odd and disappointing as it may seem, this is not an ending Luke threw in without any thought. It's exactly the way he wanted his history to end, because no matter how fascinating we may find the life stories of Peter, Philip, Paul, or any of the other strong personalities who dominate the book, the subject of Luke's narrative is not the lives of these servants of God but the gospel. Luke is concerned with how the gospel grew and expanded. When we get to the end of Acts, this is what is happening. Christianity began in Jerusalem with the commissioning of the disciples by Jesus and now in the very heart of the capital of the Roman Empire Paul is preaching.

Luke tells us that in those days, for a period of time at least, the gospel was preached without hindrance.

There were all kinds of hindrances if you look at it from a human perspective, and more would come. Persecution is a hindrance, and Paul had experienced plenty of that. Now he was in prison. He couldn't move around freely as he was accustomed to do. There was opposition from Paul's own people, the Jews. There was indifference on the part of the Roman authorities. But in spite of these external hindrances, which were great, the gospel was not hindered because the Word of God cannot be bound.

Isn't that a wonderful thing? When we talk to people about Jesus we're often focused on the hindrances before us. We don't seem to have the answers to their questions. We wish we could present the gospel more clearly and wisely. We wish we had more experience to draw from. And there are hindrances in the people too: They are hostile, out of touch, or indifferent. Most people don't want the gospel today any more than they wanted it in Jesus' or Paul's days. Yet, in spite of these hindrances, God's Word is not hindered. Our job is just to make it known, believing that the God for whom all things are possible will bless it, since He has promised to do so ([Isa 55:11](#)).

The door to the Jewish community was closing but the door to the Gentile community was opening. Acts ends with the glorious recognition of this truth. That new door to the Gentiles is open today. Acts ends as it does because throughout this age until Jesus returns the gospel door is open. As long as that door was open Paul was going to preach through it to the Gentile community.

If Paul did it, then we must do it too. It's our opportunity. If God opens a door for you to the Jews, walk through it. If He opens a door to the Gentiles, walk through. If He opens a door to your neighbor, walk through it. Wherever you go, if people will listen, tell them about Jesus, because this is the day of Christian proclamation. It's by preaching, teaching and sharing God's Word that people are brought to Jesus. 😊