

THE LOOKOUT

NOVEMBER 2023

Unit: Acts (Part 2)

Theme: The Church Goes Global

Overview: Shrunk spirits and miserly hearts have no place in God's global mission. His plans are always larger than ours (Genesis 1:28; 11:4, 9; 12:3; Isaiah 49:6; Daniel 7:13-14; Zechariah 9:9-10). Clearly God's mission for the church has always been worldwide. The International Conference on Missions realizes this; the theme for their gathering Nov. 16-18 in Oklahoma City is "Hope for the Nations." In Part 2 of this study from Acts, students will learn of this global mission by studying one family (Cornelius's household), a first journey (by Paul and Barnabas), and two cities (Ephesus and Rome).

HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.

WEEK OF NOVEMBER 8, 2023

LESSON AIM: Celebrate the inclusiveness of God's love and grace.

SCRIPT: Acts 10:1-11

THEME: The Church Goes Global

LESSON TEXT: Acts 10:1-11, 34-35

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Acts 10:1-11, 34-35, 11:1-18

STUDY

TITLES ARE ADDED TO THE CHURCH
BY PAUL SCOTT

After the initial and difficult work of the Bible study, the next step is to apply the lessons to your life. This is done by reading the Bible and applying the lessons to your life. The Bible study is a journey of discovery and growth. It is a journey of faith and hope. It is a journey of love and grace. It is a journey of service and mission. It is a journey of global mission. It is a journey of hope for the Nations.

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Tabs indicate the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery**.

APPLICATION

GO WHEREVER GOD SENDS YOU
BY DAVID FAUST

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DISCOVERY

BY DAVID FAUST

1. How do you think you are being used by God? How do you think you are being used by God? How do you think you are being used by God?
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Use the **Discovery** questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

WEEK OF NOVEMBER 26, 2023

LESSON AIM: **Pray that the gospel
continues to go forward
“unhindered.”**

UNIT: Acts (Part 2)

THEME: The Church Goes Global

LESSON TEXT: Acts 28:11-31

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Acts 27:1—28:10; Romans 1:8-17

STUDY

ROME

BY MARK SCOTT

There is a romance with the city of Rome. From the current Vatican, Saint Peter's Square, artifacts, and cathedrals to the ancient Colosseum, Titus's arch, Paul's prison, and the ancient city built on seven hills, Rome draws people to herself. This city of almost 3 million people today attracts millions of visitors each year. It also attracted the apostle Paul. He longed to go there (Romans 1:11).

Luke was very interested in telling the story of the gospel going to Rome. He recorded Jesus telling the apostles that the good news would go to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). Even on the Day of Pentecost there were visitors from Rome present (2:10). God promised Paul he would one day get there (23:11), and Paul leveraged his citizenship to ensure it (25:11-12). Paul even made his way to Rome via an all-expenses-paid trip (courtesy of the Roman government) by way of a wild ship ride (Acts 27). The shipwreck and survival at Malta delayed the arrival in Rome, but not one soul on the ship was lost; and Paul made it to Rome safely.

Anticlimactic Arrival

Acts 28:11-16

After winter ended, Paul was put on a ship that was traveling from Alexandria, Egypt, to Rome (with a stopover at Malta). The ship's "hood ornament" (or "ornaments") were the twin gods of Castor and Pollux (twin sons of Zeus, according to Greek mythology). The route took them to Syracuse (on the eastern edge of Sicily) and then up the western coast of Italy passing Rhegium (on the southernmost tip of Italy) and stopping at Puteoli. Paul was under guard but was given some freedom to spend time with fellow Christians along the way.

Then Luke simply stated, "And so we came to Rome." This is the climax of the book? Perhaps this was as far as Luke could take the story. Did he intend a third volume? Or perhaps Luke was making a theological point. Despite the persistent efforts of Paul's enemies to stifle his impact and silence his voice, God's sovereign purpose for Paul was being fulfilled. His ministry would continue, and the gospel would make further progress, as we will see. In Rome, Paul was grateful to see more believers and felt *encouraged*, even while under a Roman house arrest situation.

Surprising Reception

Acts 28:17-22

Paul followed his typical missionary strategy and met with the Jewish leaders first. He shared his testimony with

them by stating that he had been above reproach in his dealings with his *people*. He had not violated their *customs*, nor had he committed any *crime deserving death*. The Jewish leaders had handed him over to the Romans, who basically forgot about him until he appealed to Caesar. Paul believed in the *hope of Israel* and that was why he was chained.

Strangely enough, the Jews in Rome seemed clueless about both Paul and his message. They had heard about what they called this new sect (most of what they heard had been negative), but they had not received any word about Paul. Did the charges against Paul slip through the cracks? Both sides probably sensed some angst, which set up the meeting to follow.

Unhindered Preaching

Acts 28:23-31

A meeting was arranged, and a large crowd gathered to hear Paul. Five terms are used to describe Paul's preaching—*explaining, witnessed, persuade, proclaimed, and taught*. The message of the gospel is always verbal. Paul spoke with them *from morning till evening*. His content concerned the government of God (his kingdom), and his sources were drawn from the *Law of Moses and from the Prophets*. But Paul didn't simply relate facts. He worked to *persuade* his audience about Jesus' identity.

As is usually the case when the gospel seed is spread, some responded positively and some responded negatively. They could not even agree among themselves about Paul's teaching. Paul decided to quote Isaiah 6:9-10. When Isaiah was called into prophetic service, God warned him that not all would really "hear" him. In both Isaiah's day and Paul's day, the Jewish *heart was calloused*. Even though God pleaded with them to repent, they refused. Isaiah's prophecy was being relived. Paul took this as a crucial turning point. Jewish rejection allowed for Gentile inclusion.

Similar to his two years in a Caesarean jail (Acts 24:27), Paul spent two more years under house arrest in Rome. He experienced just enough freedom to preach the reign of God and the identity of Jesus. He did so *with all boldness and without hindrance*.

Thus this great book of Acts ends with two words: *without hindrance*. It is also the story of how Acts continues: the church moves forward through the world without hindrance while quietly converting the hearts of people. ■

APPLICATION

UNHINDERED

BY DAVID FAUST

One of my favorite parts of the book of Acts is its last verse. Luke ends his account of the early church's history on an upbeat note. He summarizes the apostle Paul's ministry while under house arrest in Rome by exclaiming, "He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all boldness and without hindrance!" (Acts 28:31).

Facing the Obstacles

In the first century, many things hindered the spread of the gospel. Transportation was limited; having no cars, buses, planes, or trains made travel much more difficult. Technology and communication were limited. People had no computers, printers, phones, modern postal systems, or microphones to amplify their preaching. Yet, within 30 years of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, the gospel was impacting the capital of the Roman empire as Paul, a former Pharisee, boldly taught the message he once violently opposed.

That final verse of Acts encourages me, but it also challenges me. I don't want my own flaws or pessimism to hinder God's work, but frankly, at times I feel discouraged by all the hindrances Christians face today. Secularism prevails. Churches are being marginalized, while immorality is normalized and celebrated. Biblical values are mocked and ignored. I need to remind myself that even though hindrances abounded in first-century Rome, somehow the gospel continued to advance.

Seeing God at Work

When I ministered in Baldwin, New York, in the 1970s and '80s, our young congregation faced many obstacles. Our little handful of believers worshipped together in a rented facility. We found an empty building the Episcopal Church had closed because of what they called a "lack of interest in the community." The building looked a bit run-down, but we decided to buy the property if we could.

I put on a suit and drove to the headquarters of the Episcopal Diocese of Long Island to meet with their officials.

"How much do you want for the building and the parsonage next to it?" I asked.

"\$170,000," they answered. (That was quite a reasonable price, even in 1979.)

I swallowed hard and made a counteroffer. "Would you take \$85,000?"

To my surprise they said yes, but now I didn't know what to do because we didn't have \$85,000! Somehow, by God's grace the funding came together. We purchased the property and began holding worship services there on Sundays. The building needed a lot of work. After spending mornings in the church's office, I would change my clothes and spend my afternoons outside with a paintbrush and a bucket of paint, sprucing up the building and meeting curious passersby. My wife, Candy, and I served with that church for 10 years, through tough times and exhilarating times, before leaving in 1988 so I could join the faculty of Cincinnati Bible College & Seminary.

Fast-forward 35 years. On a sunny Sunday morning this past May, we visited that congregation, now known as One Life Christian Church. A friendly woman greeted us at the front door and asked, "Is this your first time here?" Tears filled my eyes as the building filled up with people (mostly African American and Latino) singing God's praises and sharing in Communion. The property is now debt-free and most of the church's leaders are bi-vocational, which keeps costs down.

Even when times are hard and things look grim, nothing can stop the gospel of Christ. Let's never allow our lack of faith to hinder God's work.

Personal Challenge: What is hindering your relationship with God right now? Ask the Lord to remove it or help you to keep serving him in spite of it. ■

DISCOVERY

BY DOUG REDFORD

1. Evaluate the prayer challenge that was part of the previous week's questions.
 - Can the prayers for boldness and for protection from opposition be applied to you, your family, or your church? If so, how?

Ask two people to read aloud **Acts 28:11-31** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly summarize the passage.

2. What city, town, or community holds a special fascination for you? Why?
3. Mark Scott mentions how Paul longed to go to Rome (Romans 1:11). Why do you think Paul possessed such an interest in Rome?
4. Our lesson text tells how Paul was "encouraged" by Christians whom he met at Rome (Acts 28:15).
 - How have you been encouraged over the past week by people whom God has brought into your life?
 - How were you an encouragement to someone?
5. Paul said that he was chained as he was "because of the hope of Israel" (Acts 28:20).
 - How do you think Paul's hope in Christ impacted how he viewed being chained in Rome?
 - What is the difference between Christian hope and the way the world tends to define *hope*?
6. The Jewish leaders whom Paul met in Rome used the word "sect" to describe followers of Jesus (Acts 28:22).
 - What would the term "sect" imply about followers of Jesus?
 - What negative or derogatory terms are sometimes used of followers of Jesus in today's culture?
7. Note the very different reactions of those who listened to Paul's daylong teaching session (Acts 28:24-25). Why would Paul's teaching have caused such a contrast in responses?
8. What is your favorite ending to a movie or TV program you have seen or to a book you have read?
 - What might the ending to Acts say about Luke's purpose for writing the book?
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: "I will . . ."
10. List what you consider the most important lessons you have learned from the study of Acts during the past two months. How will you personalize these lessons in order to enhance your walk with the Lord?

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **John 1:6-8, 19-34** as we begin Gospel of John (Part 1) with the theme, "Light and Life." You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. **■**