

Acts 28 John Karmelich

1. I have to admit, I have a big smile on my face as I typed the title “Acts 28”. It is the last chapter of the Book of Acts. It also ends a wonderful six-month relationship with the characters of this book. Let me say in advance that this has been a real joy, and I hope it has been equally as joyful for the reader.
2. It is also important to emphasize that this is the last *published* chapter. Acts was designed to be a continuing story written by all believers in Jesus.
 - a) Let’s go back to the working title of the Book: “The Acts of the Apostles”
 - i) Back in Lesson 1, I stated the best title I’ve read for Acts was: “The Lord Jesus Christ at Work by the Holy Spirit through the Apostles.” (J. Vernon McGee)
 - ii) After 27 lessons, that’s my favorite description of this book.
 - b) Remember the key verse of Acts from Chapter 1, Verse 9. Jesus said, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”
 - i) The Holy Spirit came on them in Chapter 2 (Pentecost). From Chapters 2 through 28, we read of the apostles, *given power* to be witnesses for Jesus Christ first in Judea, second in Samaria and third to the ends of the earth.
 - ii) By Chapter 28, we have Paul arriving in Rome. Rome is still at the height of its power, having conquered much of Europe and parts of Asia and Northern Africa. In the approximately 30 years that occurred between Chapters 2 and Chapters 28, we have Christianity spreading all over the Roman Empire.
 - a) When Paul arrived in Rome in Chapter 28, there were *already* Christians there to greet him. Paul wrote his letter to the Romans (i.e. Roman Christians) years earlier.
 - c) One of my premises of The Book of Acts is that it is designed to be a continuing story. The Book itself ends simply with Paul in Rome, under house arrest, given some freedom, waiting for his big trial in front of Emperor Nero.
 - i) It seems like a strange way to end the book, but I believe that was Luke’s idea. Acts was designed to be a continuous story until Jesus comes back for his church. You and I, fellow-Christians are the continuing Book of Acts. God has given that same power to us as believers that he gave to the early apostles. He has given us specific gifts and power to *be* his witnesses to the end of the earth.
 - ii) OK, John, its been 2,000 years. Why are we still at it? If we have all this power, why hasn’t Jesus come back yet?
 - a) Well, for starters, we wouldn’t be saved, or even exist if Jesus came back, oh say 50-100 years ago, so thank God for that.
 - b) Second, remember that the purpose of this 2,000+ years is so God can build up a church for himself. In heaven, there will be Old Testament Saints and yes, people who never heard of Jesus. Remember God will judge people *fairly* in the great judgement based on what they *do* know. The point is the church is “something special” among the people who will be redeemed.
 - (1) Just as God had (and has) a special “contract/convenant relationship with Israel, so he has one with the church.
 - (2) The church era “ends” when the “fullness of the Gentiles” is complete (Romans 11:25). God has a specific number of people who will be saved as “the church”.

- (3) God, and God alone knows that specific number. Our job is to work to “increase” the number of believers until God the father says, “OK, that’s everybody, its time for Jesus to go back!.
3. Chapter 28 focuses on 3 events:
- a) 1. After the shipwreck in Chapter 27, everyone survives and lands on the Island of Malta, near Sicily. The first 10 verses are about Paul’s adventures on Malta.
 - b) 2. Travel to Rome. Verses 11-16 focus on Paul’s final part of the voyage to Rome.
 - c) 3. Paul is now in Rome. Verses 17-31 focus on Paul in Rome, and particularly on Paul’s witness to the non-Christian Jews within Rome.
 - d) What do these events have in common?
 - e) I believe this is a final example of being a Christian witness to different groups and their *reactions* to the Gospel Message.
 - i) In the first 10 verses, we have Paul speaking to Gentiles with no knowledge of the God of the Old Testament.
 - ii) In Verses 11-16 we have Paul’s travel to Rome. It shows the fulfillment of God’s promise to Paul that he would reach Rome. God forgot to mention the part about the shipwreck on the way ☺, but he did promise Paul he would reach Rome.
 - a) Part of the reason for the shipwreck was to test Paul’s faith.
 - b) The other part was God wanted Paul to give to share the Gospel to a group of gentiles in Malta.
 - (1) The events of Malta, along with Paul’s travel to Rome were a time of encouragement after a rough travel and near-death experience.
 - c) The final 15 verses mainly focus on Paul giving a final message to the Jews. It concludes with a prophecy prediction about how the Jews (meaning the nation-corporately, *not* individuals) would reject Jesus as the Messiah.
 - d) Near the end of this study, I’ll talk about why the author Luke ends on this point and what it means to us as Christians.
4. With that, let’s start on Chapter 28, Verse 1: Once safely on shore, we found out that the island was called Malta.
- a) Chapter 27 was about a shipwreck. All 276 people on board survived, but the ship was completely destroyed. They all reached the shore by swimming or hanging on to boards.
 - b) Malta is 58 miles south of Sicily. It is 18 miles wide long and 8 miles wide. It has been a Roman colony since 218 BC.
 - c) Remember that everybody just survived this shipwreck. The weather for the past 14+ days has been horrible and the crew lost their bearings of where they were. Now, landing on the beach, they discovered where they were.
 - d) I find it interesting that the word “Malta” means “refuge”.
5. Verse 2: The islanders showed us unusual kindness. They built a fire and welcomed us all because it was raining and cold.
- a) The “islanders” refers to the local natives, not the Roman colonists. The Greek word literally means “barbarian” which, in that culture meant “anybody who didn’t speak Greek”. To that culture, anybody who didn’t speak Greek was considered uncivilized.
 - b) We’re going to find out in a few verses how most of the islanders accept Christianity. Notice how God is preparing their hearts already. The locals did their best to welcome them. Luke uses the term here “unusual kindness”. Here were all these shipwrecked people coming ashore.

6. Verse 3: Paul gathered a pile of brushwood and, as he put it on the fire, a viper, driven out by the heat, fastened itself on his hand.
- a) I like Paul's attitude here. He helped gather wood. You don't read of Paul saying "See, I told you everyone would survive, you didn't believe me did you!". He took the role of a servant.
 - b) A viper, is a type of poisonous snake. Today there are no snakes *left* on Malta. This is a small island, and after 2,000 years, they are extinct at this location.
7. Verse 4: When the islanders saw the snake hanging from his hand, they said to each other, "This man must be a murderer; for though he escaped from the sea, Justice has not allowed him to live."
- a) I'm sure as the locals were talking to the Roman officials, it was discovered that the ship was full of prisoners. That must have scared the natives. How would you feel if a shipfull of convicts showed up on your front doorstep? ☺
 - i) By the way, you don't read of any of the prisoners making a run for it. I'm guessing the scare of the shipwreck and the warm-fire kept everybody around.
 - b) The natives believed in "fatalism". They guessed that Paul suffered the "fate" of being bitten by a snake because he must have done something horrible in the past.
 - c) Today, we have another word for fatalism. It is "karma". Karma has its roots in the Hindu religion. It means that "god", whoever it is, will perform justice. "Bad Karma" means that when you suffer something bad, it is god, or fate for some evil you have done in the past.
 - i) The Christian response to fatalism, or karma, is that many people *never* go punished for their bad deeds in life. Some people do get away with injustice. The Bible teaches that there is a judgement for all people. Thus, the necessity of a resurrection for everyone.
 - a) David, in the Psalms, contemplated this problem:
 - (1) "When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny. (Psalm 73:16-17 NIV)
8. Verse 5: But Paul shook the snake off into the fire and suffered no ill effects. ⁶ The people expected him to swell up or suddenly fall dead, but after waiting a long time and seeing nothing unusual happen to him, they changed their minds and said he was a god.
- a) You have to find this attitude a little comical. First the natives see Paul bitten by a snake and think "he must be a murderer and God is getting him." Paul survives the snake bite and the natives think "he must be a god"
 - i) In all probability it means the natives thought that Paul was either a god or someone who is miraculously protected by the gods.
 - b) Notice how Paul just "shakes" off the viper like it was a bug. At this point, I think Paul was walking with a lot of faith. God promised Paul he was going to make it to Rome. If a shipwreck didn't kill him, Paul doubted a snake would do the trick!
 - c) Many commentators see this as another demonic attack. Satan is doing his best to try to stop God's "game plan", and thus allows a poisonous snake to bite Paul. Do you think it is a "coincidence" that no one else gets bit?"
 - d) This verse is also the fulfillment of a prediction made by Jesus about believers:
 - i) "And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well." (Mark 16:17-18 NIV)

- a) T “snake” prediction true through Paul. This verse in Mark also mentions healing, and we’ll see that as well here in Malta.
 - e) Not much is said about Paul’s comments to the local natives after this event. We don’t have to know, because this story is “d  j   vu” of a similar incident in Chapter 14:
 - i) In Chapter 14, Paul instantly heals a man who was crippled from birth. The local crowd thought that Paul was a god. Here was Paul’s response to the claim of being a god in Chapter 14. I’m sure he gave a similar response here:
 - a) “Men, why are you doing this? We too are only men, human like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them. (Acts 14:15 NIV)
9. Verse 7: There was an estate nearby that belonged to Publius, the chief official of the island. He welcomed us to his home and for three days entertained us hospitably.
- a) Remember that Malta was a Roman Colony. Publius was “the big fish in the small pond.” He was the head guy for the entire island.
 - i) The verse says that “we” were entertained at his home. We’re not sure if this refers to all 276 people, or just some selected people from the passenger list..
 - b) It’s interesting to see how God works? First, we had this horrible sea storm in Chapter 27 where nobody ate for 14 days due to seasickness. Luke and Paul were going through periods of doubts about God’s purpose and whether they would live to see Rome. Finally, the group is shipwrecked. Now we read of the group spending 3 days at the large estate home of the leading man of the island. I’m sure God planned all this for Paul to be a witness to him. Notice also how God used this time to refresh and reinvigorate Paul and his companions.
10. Verse 8: His father was sick in bed, suffering from fever and dysentery. Paul went in to see him and, after prayer, placed his hands on him and healed him. ⁹ When this had happened, the rest of the sick on the island came and were cured.
- a) Publius’s father was sick in bed. Most commentators believe the disease is a recurring fever that lasts for months. It is associated with goat’s milk.
 - b) Don’t you just love to see how God works? The *head guy* of the island, has a sick father. Paul, who is on a ship is blown *way off* course, lands on this island. Now Paul has an opportunity to perform a miraculously healing and get a chance to show how God works and give an opportunity to preach the Gospel.
 - i) I’ve stated several times through the lessons that I believe God saves his best miracles for the missionaries. In the United States, we have Bible radio, Bible TV shows and the Internet. One can get a Bible free at most motels. There is no excuse for any adult in this country to say to God “I never heard the Gospel”. Places in the world where the Bible message is not so prevalent, is where God works some tremendous miracles as *demonstrations* for the Gospel message.
 - c) Going back to these verses, notice that Paul *heals* Publius’ father in Verse 7 and the rest of the sick were *cured* in Verse 9. These are different Greek words. Remember that Luke was a doctor. God gave Luke “talents” to heal people via the use and knowledge of medicine. Luke used his God-given-talents for God’s glory. This is a good verse in support of missionary hospital work.
11. Verse 10: They honored us in many ways and when we were ready to sail, they furnished us with the supplies we needed.
- a) There is little, if any message about Paul’s actually preaching the Gospel to the local residents. After 27 chapters in Acts, it is not necessary. We can study the patterns of Paul’s life and logically assume that the message was preached.

- b) The interesting thing to notice about Paul and Luke’s experience on Malta is how God often gives us periods of comfort between long struggles. Our heroes survived a major shipwreck. They knew that they were going to board another ship to Rome. Who knows what else God had planned for them on the way? This 3-month period on Malta was a wonderful time of refreshment both physically and spiritually.
12. Verse 11: After three months we put out to sea in a ship that had wintered in the island. It was an Alexandrian ship with the figurehead of the twin gods Castor and Pollux.
- a) Other ships harbored the winter at Malta. After 3 months, the winter storms had passed, and it was time to sail again.
- b) Today we call ships by their names. At that time, the name was associated with the figurehead gods at the head of the ship. We know these Greek-gods better as “Gemini twins”.
13. Verse 12: We put in at Syracuse and stayed there three days.¹³ From there we set sail and arrived at Rhegium. The next day the south wind came up, and on the following day we reached Puteoli.
- a) Syracuse was the most important city in Sicily, which is a very large island off of Italy.
- b) The shape of Italy is described as being like a giant “boot”. Rhegium is a harbor on the “toe” of Italy. It is still another 130 miles to Rome.
14. Verse 14: There we found some brothers who invited us to spend a week with them. And so we came to Rome.
- a) Here we are in a harbor, on the coast of Italy, and there were Christians there. History tells us that there was a Jewish colony that settled there (source Josephus). Most likely some of the Jews converted to Christianity. Remember during the first Pentecost in Acts Chapter 2, that group included “visitors from Rome” referring to Roman-based Jews. Again, this is speculation, but it would explain how Christians got this far.
- b) Travel from Rhegium to Rome was by land. In this verse, Paul had fulfilled what God had called him to do, which is to be his witness in Rome.
- c) Remember that Paul was still a prisoner. There was probably a guard attached to him. Paul must have really gained the confidence of the Roman guard if he was allowed to spend a week with newly found friends. I suspect the guards were becoming more acceptable of Christians by this time.
15. Verse 15: The brothers there had heard that we were coming, and they traveled as far as the Forum of Appius and the Three Taverns to meet us. At the sight of these men Paul thanked God and was encouraged.
- a) Paul received a wonderful welcoming committee when he reached Rome. It makes you wonder a little how word of Paul’s arrival got to Rome before Paul!
- b) The Roman road system had “halting stations” (a.k.a.: checkpoints) every 10-15 miles. Both the Three Taverns and the Forum of Appius are landmark-halting stations. The Forum area was a local “retail market” based around this halting station.
- i) Some came as far as the Forum of Appius, which was 40 miles from Rome; others came 30 miles out to the Three Taverns.
- ii) Jon Curson gave an interesting sermon how some people were willing to travel further to see Paul than others. The basis of the sermon is that some people have more of a thirst of the “things of God” than others do.
- a) With my whole heart I have sought You; Oh, let me not wander from Your commandments! (Psalm 119:10 NKJV)
- c) Paul wrote his letter to the Romans several years earlier. Therefore, since this letter was in circulation among the Roman Christians, they probably felt like they knew Paul already. When an Emperor returns to Rome, it is customary to travel out on the road to greet him as he comes in the City. Paul got the same treatment from some believers.

16. Verse 16: When we got to Rome, Paul was allowed to live by himself, with a soldier to guard him.
- a) Paul was chained to a soldier. In actuality, it was probably 3 soldiers on shifts. Paul probably saw this as a wonderful witnessing opportunity. They couldn't run away! ☺
17. Verse 17: Three days later he called together the leaders of the Jews. When they had assembled, Paul said to them: "My brothers, although I have done nothing against our people or against the customs of our ancestors, I was arrested in Jerusalem and handed over to the Romans. ¹⁸ They examined me and wanted to release me, because I was not guilty of any crime deserving death. ¹⁹ But when the Jews objected, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar--not that I had any charge to bring against my own people. ²⁰ For this reason I have asked to see you and talk with you. It is because of the hope of Israel that I am bound with this chain."
- a) Paul probably spent the first 3 days in Rome under house arrest. He probably spent time with the local Christians and got an idea of the situation of the local church.
- b) After being in Rome for 3 days, Paul's next order of business was to find the local non-Christian Jews. I suspect Paul's reason was two-fold:
- i) First, he wanted to find out what the local Jews thought of him. Back in Jerusalem and Caesarea, Paul couldn't get a fair hearing because of the Jewish leadership. Back in Jerusalem, some tried to kill Paul. Therefore, it was necessary to see what was told of him by the Israel-based Jews to the Rome-based Jews.
- ii) Second, I suspect that even to the end, Paul had a heart to convert his fellow Jews to Christianity. Even though he realized by now God had called him to the Gentiles and not the Jews, he simply refused to give up.
- iii) Therefore, Paul summed up his trials to date and laid them out for the Jewish leadership. When Paul says "it is because of the hope of Israel" in Verse 20, this is a reference to the Messiah. The "hope of Israel" is that a Messiah would come and set up an earthly kingdom from Israel. Most Christians agree with this view, and see this as part of Jesus' role in his second coming.
18. Verse 21: They replied, "We have not received any letters from Judea concerning you, and none of the brothers who have come from there has reported or said anything bad about you. ²² But we want to hear what your views are, for we know that people everywhere are talking against this sect."
- a) The local Jews stated, "they knew nothing of Paul and his trials."
- b) How they knew nothing has provided a lot of speculation by the commentators.
- i) Some argue that the "formal charges" against Paul were lost in the shipwreck. This may have been another purpose for God to allow the shipwreck.
- ii) An interesting theory is that the local Jews "were playing dumb". They had good reason. The current year of this event was about AD 60. In the year AD 49-50, the Roman Emperor Claudius expelled all Jews from Rome. (See also Acts 18:2) There were riots in the city between Christians and Jews. Romans prime rule is "maintain the peace", and thus all Jews were expelled. When Emperor Claudius died in AD 54, Jews were allowed back in the Rome.
- a) Therefore, the local Jews may have been "playing dumb" about Paul given the fact 1) he was chained to a Roman officer and 2) they didn't want to be expelled from Rome again.
- b) This is one of those "theories that fits the facts", and it is just that.
- c) Source for historical notes: Bible Expositor's Encyclopedia.
19. Verse 23: They (local Jews) arranged to meet Paul on a certain day, and came in even larger numbers to the place where he was staying. From morning till evening he explained and declared to them the kingdom of God and tried to convince them about Jesus from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets.

- a) Paul “let them have it”. By now we have read many of Paul’s sermons on preaching Jesus from Old Testament prophecy.
 - b) Jesus himself used this technique to some disciples after his resurrection: “And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he (Jesus) explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.” (Luke 24:27 NIV)
20. Verse 24: Some were convinced by what he said, but others would not believe.
- a) This verse implies that a large group believed the Gospel message and a large group didn’t. In some sense, this was Paul’s most successful message to the Jews. Up to now, he had very limited success in converting Jews to Christianity.
 - i) To the best of my memory, this is the first time we read of Paul actually having a successful sermon preached to a Jewish audience where many of them converted to Christianity.
 - ii) I wonder why Paul had some success *now* at this point in his journey after so many failings before Jewish audiences earlier?
 - iii) Part of the reason may be that for the first time, Paul was invited to speak as dealing with a hostile audience. Further, I take the view that God *called* Paul to preach in Rome back in Acts 23. God did not specify *who* Paul was to preach to in Rome, just that he was going to preach.
 - a) I may be off track here, but I think this is also God, out of his love for Paul, letting him win over *some* Jews for Jesus as Paul desired it so badly.!
 - b) It further goes to show that some Jews *did* receive the Gospel Message. Jewish Christians have existed (albeit, as a Jewish minority) throughout church history.
21. Verse 25: They disagreed among themselves and began to leave after Paul had made this final statement: "The Holy Spirit spoke the truth to your forefathers when he said through Isaiah the prophet: ²⁶ "Go to this people and say, "You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving." ²⁷ For this people's heart has become callused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.'
- a) Paul’s “statement” was to those Jews who would not believe. Paul quoted Isaiah 6:9-10 as they were leaving the room.
 - i) This same passage is quoted four times in the Gospels: Matthew 13:13-15; Luke 8:10; Mark 4:12 and John 12:40; Why? Why such an emphasis on this passage?
 - ii) It is given as a warning and to show the fulfillment of a prediction. When you think that the Jews have waited hundreds and hundreds of years for the Messiah to show up, and *they missed it*. Jesus, Paul, the apostles were all *pleading* with the Jews to recognize their errors. To all but Jesus, I’m sure this prophecy was a shock in how literally true it became.
 - iii) To paraphrase this prediction, it is saying: “You reject God’s message over and over, and now I God, will make it *impossible* for you to comprehend it. Because I (God) love you and all mankind, I am giving you over to your free-will desires. I (God) am doing this to show to others and yourself the errors of your ways. The truth of Jesus is so obvious that it is *necessary* that I control your thoughts so that it will become *impossible* for you to accept Jesus. “

- a) This is what Jesus meant by “blasphemy of the Holy Spirit”. It is the only unforgivable sin in the Bible. It is the continual rejection of Jesus. God is saying in effect “I’ll only give you so many chances, after that it is too late.” God does this 1) to bring to urgency the necessity of turning to Jesus now, and bring us to the urgency to get out the Gospel message.
- b) Whether we accept this method or not, the truth is God’s in charge, and we’re not! How “long” one can go rejecting the Gospel message before God closes the door is up to God on any one individual. We don’t know that time frame, only God does.
- c) It may help to understand if you go back and read the Bible text again of this paragraph (go ahead, I’ll wait. ☺) Notice through the centuries how literal this prophecy has come true.
- d) Notice the last line of the prophecy says, “and I would heal them.”. Heal them of what? Their sins! It doesn’t mean they become perfect, just forgiven of their sins.

22. Verse 28 "Therefore I want you to know that God's salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen!"

- a) Why would Paul yell out to the non-believing Jews that “salvation is being sent to the Gentiles?”
 - i) Paul answered this question in his letter to the Romans:
 - ii) “And did they understand (that God would give his salvation to others if they refused to take it)? Yes, for even back in the time of Moses, God had said that he would make his people jealous and try to wake them up by giving his salvation to the foolish heathen nations.” (Romans 10:19 The Living Bible)
 - iii) Paul was speaking in Verse 28 to the Roman Jews. This letter was written to the Roman Christians (within the previous two years) about non-Christian-Jews.
 - iv) This verse implies that God still cares about the people of Israel. Part of God’s redemptive plan is to bring salvation to the Gentiles *in order* to make the Jews jealous. That is the concept behind Romans 10:19.
 - a) Remember that we, as Gentile believers, worship a Jewish-God, and a Jewish based religion. One of the promises of the Messiah in the Old Testament is that he will be “a light to the Gentiles” (Isaiah 49:6).
 - b) Even if Jews today deny every other aspect about Jesus, they have to admit he is the only Jew who is “the light” to billions of Gentiles. That is the point. God is using as much evidence as possible to make them realize the error of rejecting Jesus as the Messiah.

23. Before I close, let’s stand back and look how this chapter is a summary of how Christians can be a witness to all types of people.

- a) First we had a group of friendly Gentiles who never heard the Gospel message. God used a miracle to open their hearts to what Paul had to say. Through the centuries since Paul, this story, through many types of miracles has been repeated over and over again as missionaries go into new territories.
- b) Second, we had Paul doing “long term witnessing” to the Romans traveling with Paul. Most people don’t become Christians instantly. It is a long-term witness of being around Christians and seeing the joy in their heart through their circumstances. That is the case of the Roman guards and other prisoners as they traveled with Paul and his companions.

- i) There is an interesting quote in Paul's Letter to the Philippians:
 - a) All the saints greet you, but especially those who are of Caesar's household. (Philippians 4:22 NKJV)
 - b) Do you know when Paul wrote Philippians? Sometime in the next two years, while Paul was in a Roman jail cell! Paul was converting those of Caesar's household to Christianity.
 - ii) I suspect, but can't prove the trip to Rome, and the guards chained to Paul were converted to Christianity because of the long-term witness of Paul on his way to Rome and in Rome, plus of the miracles in Malta.
 - c) Finally, we have the final Message to Jewish non-believers.
 - i) This is the warnings that Paul gave that God predicted their "heart will grow cold" if they continue to reject Jesus as Messiah.
 - d) And now the final two verses of the Book of Acts, the author Luke focuses on the continual work of the Gospel to all the world:
24. Verse 30: For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. ³¹ Boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ.
- a) This seems like a strange way to end the Book of Acts. On one hand, it sounds like a happily ever after ending where Paul then spends the rest of his life in Rome preaching away. Historically, the truth is the opposite.
 - i) Early church history teaches us that Paul won his appeal, and he then goes to other locations around Europe and Asia Minor preaching the Gospel message. He was eventually re-arrested by Nero who had Paul arrested again. Paul's 2nd Letter to Timothy was written shortly before his death. Finally, Paul was taken out of prison and beheaded.
 - b) If you read the text in the original Greek, the sentence structure is different than as shown above. The final three words in the Book of Acts is word which is translated "boldness and without hindrance" in Verse 31.
 - i) The author Luke could have added more about Paul's latter adventures, but I believe there is a purpose for ending Acts on this sentence. That purpose is the message preached in the last sentence. Paul went on preaching the kingdom of God "boldly and without hindrance".
 - a) That is the message for you and I to continue with!
 - ii) The Book of Acts was never designed to end at Chapter 28. It was meant to be a continuing story that ends with the return of Jesus Christ. You and I are currently working on Chapter 3,547 of the Book of Acts.
25. Let's go back to the main-theme verse of the Book of Acts, which is found in Chapter 1.
- a) Jesus said to the disciples "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8 NIV)
 - b) God has called us to be his witnesses. He provides us with *power* to be his witnesses and without hindrance.
 - c) Wait a minute John, you just said without hindrance. We just read through 26 chapters of intense spiritual warfare. We read of disciples being killed for their beliefs. We read of disciples being arrested and put in jail for their faith in Jesus. We read of people trying to ambush Paul to kill him. We read of shipwrecks. You expect me to believe that we are to preach the Gospel "unhindered"? When was Paul ever unhindered, or anybody else in the Book of Acts for that matter?

- i) The mistake we make is the same one the disciples made all through the Book of Acts. They look at their circumstances and they have fear. They trust in their own ability to save people and they fail. The secret of living the Christian life is to put your trust in God no matter what.
 - ii) Remember what Jesus said “For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” (Matthew 11:30 NIV)
 - a) A yoke is a neckbrace worn by an ox when plowing. When farmers are breaking in a young ox, there will be an older experienced ox doing most of the work, and a younger ox pulling less weight. That is what Jesus meant by my “yoke is easy”, as well as “my burden is light”. We are called to be slaves to Jesus. What Jesus is saying is the “burden” of Christianity is light.
 - iii) OK, John, you’ve lost me again. Paul and the disciples have gone through tremendous suffering, yet you say the Gospel is to be preached “unhindered”. A parallel idea is Jesus teaching “my burden is light”. I still don’t see how all of this is possible.
 - d) It is possible by two means. First, we trust in the *power of God*, not our own power. God promised us all the power we need to be his witnesses.
 - i) “And I (Jesus) say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” (Matthew 16:18 KJV)
 - ii) God provides us with all the power we need to be his witness, and all the power of hell can not stop it.
 - iii) The secret of being God’s witness “unhindered” is not to focus on the pain and the trials of life, the key is to focus on eternity and God. God *will* win in the end. That is what the Bible promises. Our job in prayer and studying God’s word is to figure out God’s plan and be a part of that redemptive plan. Prayer is not getting our will done, but God’s will done. (Try opening your next prayer with Lord, how I *specifically* glorify you with my prayers today? See what God brings to mind and pray for God to be glorified through that situation!)
 - a) Jesus said “However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.” (Luke 10:20 NIV)
 - (1) That’s the attitude to strive for as Christians. Not the power we are given as Christians, not the fact that the Gospel message will continue to be preached unhindered, but we have joy in our hearts that we will live forever.
 - (2) Discovering that secret is what life is all about. To live to serve God brings far greater joy than to live to serve yourself. The ability to have joy in our lives and to love one another unconditionally, to be witnesses for Jesus starts with the power of God working *through* us. That is what is meant by having the “power” and having it “unhindered”.
26. With that, I pray that as you write *your* chapter in the Book of Acts, that God’s power may rest on you, that you may be his witnesses unhindered.

Supplement: Bibliography

“If I have seen further, it is because I have stood on the shoulders of giants.”
(Issac Newton)

Without prayer and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, all these commentaries are useless. My weekly prayer was for God to show me the things He wanted *me* to learn, and second, the lessons He wanted me to pass on in my writings. I have quoted many sources throughout these lessons. If any of these writers appeal to you, I invite you to read or listen to further commentaries as listed below. I have also quoted other sources not listed, and those names are usually listed in the lessons. These other authors were usually quoted from the materials listed below and taken from those sources.

First and foremost, the greatest commentary on the Bible is the Bible itself. I mostly quote The New International Version (NIV), The New King James Version (NKJV), The King James Version (KJV) and the paraphrased-translations: The Living Bible (TLB) and the Good News Bible (GNB). The Bible text used is from the NIV. I use it as it is the most popular. I don't have a particular favorite translation and I personally use lots of translations.

Here are the commentaries I have referenced over the past lessons, (in no particular order).

1. The Book of the Acts (New International Commentary on the New Testament) by F. F. Bruce; Dec. 1980 Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co
2. Commentary on Acts by Jon Curson, (available for free on the Internet, via Real Audio at, <http://www.applegatefellowship.org/teachings/pastorjon/acts.asp> . This was an expository Bible study given On Exodus in 1992 . The lessons from this series are also available in book form from Harvest House Publishing.
3. The Expositor's Bible Encyclopedia, Zondervan Publications, (via CD-ROM 1998 release). This is a multi-volume encyclopedia with notes on every verse of the Bible. (Available at Christian Bookstores.) Paperback books are published on individual Bible books from this source.
4. Acts by J. Vernon McGee. Nelson Publishing, 1982. This is available in book and computer software formats. The late Dr. McGee has written commentaries on every book of the Bible. He is still broadcast daily in 60 languages around the world on Christian Radio.
5. Audio Commentary on Exodus by Chuck Missler, available at K-House Ministries 1-800-KHOUSE1. The web address is <http://www.khouse.org/> It is also free at <http://firefighters.org/html/library.cfm>
6. Commentary on Acts by David Guzik. (available for free on the Internet, in text versions. The web address is <http://calvarychapel.com/simivalley/commentaries/44.html>
7. Commentary on the Acts by Ray Steadman 41 Messages. Book is in print Available for free at <http://pbc.org/dp/stedman/acts/index.html>
8. The Communicators Commentary : Acts by Lloyd Ogilvie (April 1983) Word Publishing
9. Jewish New Testament Commentary : A Companion Volume to the Jewish New Testament -- David H. Stern; (June 1994) Jewish New Testament Pubns; ISBN: 9653590081 ; David Stern is a Messianic Jew who gives some great insights on Jewish thought and tradition as it related to the New Testament.
10. The Life Application Bible, Zondervan Publishing <http://www.zondervanbibles.com/0310919770.htm>
11. Nelson's Quick Reference Chapter-by-Chapter Bible Commentary Warren Wiersbe, Nelson Publishing 1991. (Available at Christian Bookstores.)
12. Halley's Bible Handbook by Henry H. Halley Zondervan Publishing Revised edition, 1979 Now available in CD ROM as well as hardcover through Zondervan.
13. When Critics Ask : A Popular Handbook on Bible Difficulties -- Norman L. Geisler, Thomas Howe; Baker Book House 1999 (Available at Christian Bookstores.)
14. Complete Works of C.S. Spurgeon New Ages Bible Software (CD-ROM format).