

Text: Ac 28.21-29

We are rapidly coming to the conclusion of our series on Acts. In my bible software program, I've closed all my commentaries on the book and deleted my "Acts setup." I always feel a sense of loss (at the old series) and anticipation (for the new series) when this happens.

Fortunately, I go so slow that this isn't a frequent sensation!

Last week we had Paul in a meeting with the elders among the Jews in Jerusalem. He was speaking to them of *the Hope of Israel*, which was the subject of our message.

Today, we will look at the conclusion of that meeting and the account of a wider meeting that followed when many Jews came to Paul and heard the gospel message.

The result of that meeting was "the usual..." as we see from the verse that really forms the heart of our message:

Ac 28.24 Some were being persuaded by the things spoken, but others would not believe.

The usual response of the first century Jews to the gospel:

Some Were Persuaded

In our message today, we want to think about who was listening to the message, the effect it had on them, what God thought about them, and what the whole experience means for us and for the book of Acts.

That's a lot, so let's read Acts 28.21-29

Proposition: The missionary narrative of Acts closes with a sober warning against unbelief; some were persuaded, but most were not, more folly to them.

I. Open enough to hear

A. Review: Paul requests a meeting for the sake of the hope of Israel (17-20)

1. Paul was anxious to gain a favorable hearing of the Roman Jews
2. Paul protested that his message was consistent with the Hope of Israel (20)

B. The open but cautious response of the Jews (21-22)

1. The Jews of Rome knew nothing of Paul's case
 - a. Some writers scoff at Luke's report here
 - b. But note: Paul had difficulty traveling from Caesarea to Rome
 - 1) His arrival was early in the new sailing season
 - 2) Travelers (or letters) from Jerusalem would experience the same difficulties
 - c. Consequently, their comment is entirely credible

2. The Jews of Rome are interested in hearing more

- a. Our vss. translate "we desire"
- b. Word is lit. "we think it worthy"

A. T. Robertson: "They think it only fair to hear Paul's side of his case."¹

- c. In other words, cautious interest

3. The Jews of Rome admit a negative impression

- a. Several commentators point back to Ac 18.2

Ac 18.2 And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, having recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. He came to them,

- b. The Christians in Rome had a long history, going back before this expulsion
- c. Suetonius, a Roman historian, said Claudius expelled the Jews "because they were 'indulging in constant riots at the instigation of Chrestus.'"²

¹ A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1933), Ac 28.22.

² F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of the Acts*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 347.

- d. This is supposed by some to relate to controversy among the Jews in Rome over Christ and the Christians.
- e. If this is correct, now almost ten years on, the Roman Jews would retain a negative bias
- f. In any case, they had to know Jewish Christians in Rome and felt slighted by their separation to Christ

Thus, willing to listen, but cautious

C. The extended session with many Jews (23)

1. The gathering in Paul's lodgings
 - a. Attended in "large numbers"
 - b. Extended "from morning until evening"
2. The subjects of extended discussion (of which more next week)
 - a. "The kingdom of God"
 - b. Things "concerning Jesus"
 - c. All based on "the Law of Moses and from the Prophets"

One recalls the Lord teaching the two on the road to Emmaus from these same passages

My first point is this: "**Open enough to hear,**" but ... only ...

II. Some open enough to believe (24-25a)

A. The day ends with division among the Jews

1. Some "were persuaded"
2. Others "would not believe"
3. "They did not agree"

One imagines the scene: they arrived early in the morning; they stayed all day till the light faded... in the light of the evening torches they are making *eternal* decisions...

B. What insight does this give about saving faith?

1. Those believing were persuaded "by the things spoken"
 - a. They listened to Moses

- b. They listened to the Prophets
- c. They listened to Paul

They were persuaded

- 2. Those not believing “would not believe”
 - a. They were not simply “remaining” in their old positions
 - b. They were rejecting the things spoken: they “would not believe”
- 3. Saving faith is a decision the individual must make in response to the gospel message
 - a. God doesn’t give faith to one man and not another
 - b. God gives an opportunity to all who hear
 - c. Those who are willing, believe; those who are unwilling, reject

My point here: **“Some open enough to believe”** ... what did that mean for those who would not believe?

III. Closed enough against unbelief (25b-29)

A. Paul gives the Jews a parting warning from Isaiah

- 1. The passage he quotes is Isa 6.9-10, from Isaiah’s prophetic commission: in the Heb, they are commanded not to hear, not to see
- 2. Here, it is simply declared, they do not hear, they do not see
- 3. The warning comes from the Holy Spirit (25)
- 4. Their failure to believe marks a division between Paul and them
 - a. Called them brethren in v. 17
 - b. Condemns “your fathers” here

B. The warning is emphatic (26)

- 1. You will keep on hearing
- 2. You will keep on seeing

3. But you WILL NOT understand

- a. This verse (along with Ac 13.41) are the only places where the emphatic neg. οὐ μὴ occurs in Acts, here twice
- b. “Not not” = “Certainly not”

C. The reason is graphic

1. Given as a chiasmic figure

Heart dull...

Ears scarcely hear

Eyes closed

Otherwise

Might see with eyes

Hear with ears

Understand with heart

2. Dull heart is one that is *fat* or *thick*

“pictures a heart so full that it is unresponsive (BAGD 638 §2; BDAG 790). Nothing can penetrate it to its core.”³

3. Word picture for ears

“The ears are pictured as tired and too weighed down to function.”⁴

4. The eyes are shut

“They had eyes to **see**, ears to **hear**, but the **heart**—the organ of thinking, willing, and deciding—failed to respond.”⁵

- a. More than mere failure to respond
- b. See v. 24: “they would not believe” — unwillingness, not inability

³ Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 755.

⁴ Bock, 755.

⁵ *The ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 2145.

D. The epitaph of Israel (28)

1. The Roman Jews are merely repeating the response of Jews everywhere the gospel went in Acts
 - a. Jerusalem
 - b. Antioch of Pisidia
 - c. Corinth
 - d. Ephesus
2. The turn to the Gentiles also happened everywhere through Acts
3. These Roman Jews still had opportunities to hear, but Luke pictures this as the final word to Judaism

Kellum calls this a “chilling reality.”⁶
Constable: “the ultimate climax of Acts”⁷
4. Vs. 29 not included in the older Gk mss.
 - a. NAU includes it in italics
 - b. Some vss. leave it out with a footnote
 - c. Provides a fitting closing statement nonetheless

Conclusion:

Proposition: The missionary narrative of Acts closes with a sober warning against unbelief; some were persuaded, but most were not, more folly to them.

Some people, when hearing the gospel, want to argue about it. They will pick at this point and that point.

All their nitpicking is ineffective: answers are available for every complaint.

The issue isn't the facts of the gospel, it's the condition of the heart.

Will you believe, or will you not?

⁶ L. Scott Kellum, *Acts*, ed. Andreas J. Köstenberger and Robert W. Yarbrough, Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament (Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2020), 316.

⁷ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Ac 28.28.