

# BIGGER THAN YOU

## Lesson 24 The Ongoing Mission

### Acts 28:11-31

*When Paul said his last good-byes to the churches he had planted on the three missionary journeys, he considered his work finished in that part of the world (Rom. 15:23). He would in the future continue to write letters to these churches, but his desire was to preach the gospel where Christ had never been preached (Rom. 15:20). He chose a course which would take him to Jerusalem, planning to go from there to Spain to begin a new work. On his way, he intended to stop over in Rome, where he had never been, to visit the believers there. However, as we have seen, his life did not happen as he had planned. He was arrested within days of his arrival in Jerusalem, and held in custody for two years. He eventually appealed to Caesar to escape his enemies, sailed for Rome as a prisoner, survived a storm, a shipwreck, and a poisonous snake bite – and finally arrived in Rome. The Book of Acts ends without telling the end of Paul's life, but with the story of the spread of the gospel going onward – and continuing to this day.*

#### Read Acts 28:11-16

1. The 276 survivors of the shipwreck washed up on the island of Malta where Paul and Luke stayed for 3 months. Use the map on page 3 to trace the journey from Malta to Rome.
  - a. What did Paul do when believers from Rome heard he was coming and hurried to meet him at Three Taverns, outside Rome?
  - b. Paul arrived in Rome, still a prisoner. What were the arrangements of his confinement (verse 16)?

#### Read Acts 28:17-31

2. Within 3 days of his arrival in Rome, Paul called a meeting. Who did he invite?
3. Paul reviewed the story of how he had conflicted with the Jews in Jerusalem and ended up in Rome, chained to a Roman soldier. What did he say was the cause of it all (verse 20)? What did he mean?
4. Paul had connections in the Christian community in Rome. He wrote the Book of Romans to them while he was ministering at Corinth. In Romans 16, Paul sends greetings to at least 26 individuals he knows who are living in Rome. He had desired to visit them for years and when he finally touched soil in Italy, the brothers in Christ heard he was coming and set out to meet him even before he arrived in Rome. Can you imagine any explanation for the Roman Jewish community not having received any letters concerning Paul nor heard anything against him from the Jews who had come from Judea to Rome (verse 21)?
5. From verse 22, what was their interest in Paul and his message?
6. Paul was confined and chained. The Jews came to him and stayed all day to hear his teaching.
  - a. About what did Paul teach and persuade them (verse 23)?
  - b. What was the response to his teaching?
  - c. Paul's final statement to them included a quotation of Isa. 6:9-10 from the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint. This quotation was the message given to Isaiah to preach to the Jews of his

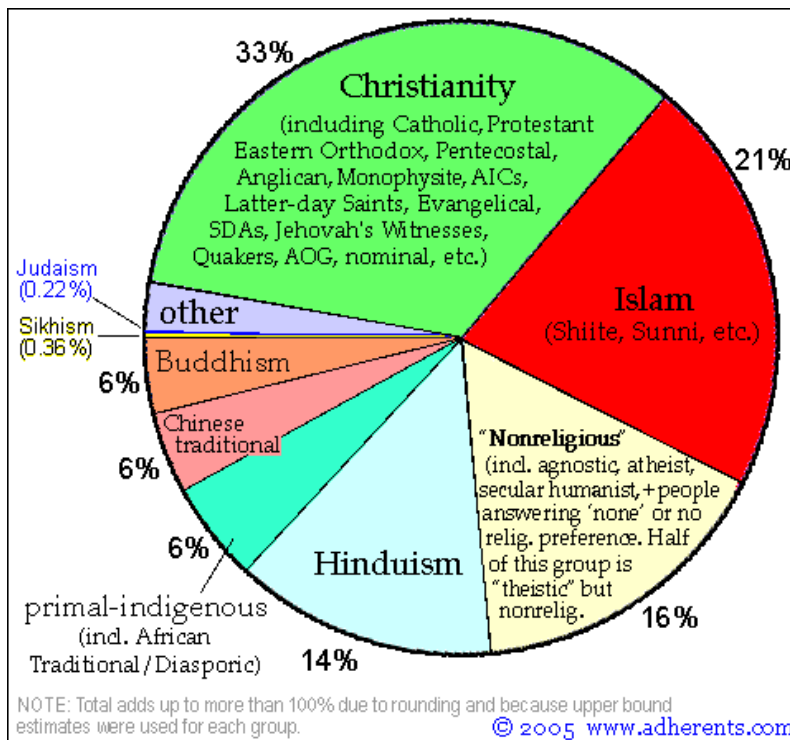
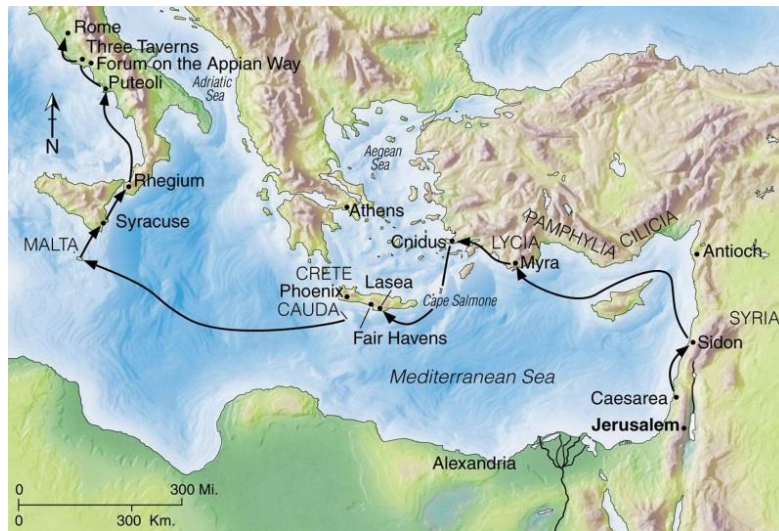
day in 740 B.C. Jesus had used the same quotation when he explained the parable of the sower in Matt. 13:1-23. Paraphrase this important quotation from Isaiah.

7. For 2 years Paul was in prison and people came to him to hear him preach.
  - a. What did he preach?
  - b. How did he preach?
  - c. In the last sentence of the introduction to this lesson, we hinted at why we think the Book of Acts seems to end so abruptly. What do you think?
  
8. From his Roman prison, scholars believe that Paul wrote 4 letters which are preserved for us today as Books of the New Testament. The 4 books are Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. Each of these books make reference to Paul being in prison and his message is enriched by his situation.
  - a. Read Eph. 6:19-20. Note the words that tell us that Paul is in prison.
  - b. Now, read Eph. 6:10-18, remembering where Paul is. How is the passage enriched for you? Discuss.
  - c. Read Phil. 1:7, 12-14. What good does Paul say has come from his being in prison?
  - d. Imagine what your prayer request would be if you were in a Roman prison. Compare that to Paul's prayer request written to the church at Colossai (see Col. 4:2-4). Discuss.
  - e. Read Philemon verses 1, 9-10. Note the phrases which indicate that Paul was in prison.
  - f. Paul wrote the Book of Philemon on behalf of Onesimus, an escaped slave, whom Paul met in prison. Paul is sending him back to his Christian master, Philemon (verses 8-16). What change occurred while Onesimus was imprisoned? What is Paul requesting on Onesimus's behalf?
  - g. What do we learn about Paul's status in prison from Philemon verse 22?
  
9. Some scholars believe that Paul was released from this first imprisonment in Rome, preached 2 more years, and was imprisoned in Rome again. He was tried and executed in 64 A.D. The only reference we have in scripture to his last imprisonment is found in 2 Tim. 4:6-22, where Paul writes to Timothy, the young apprentice and son in the faith whom he left in Ephesus to serve the church.
  - a. What do you think Paul expected the outcome to be for his second trial in Rome (verses 6-8)? How did he feel about it?
  - b. Paul says that all except one person has left him. Who is still with Paul (verse 11)?
  - c. Paul requests Timothy to come to him. What did he want him to bring (verse 13)?
  - d. What does Paul remember about his first trial in Rome (verse 16)?
  - e. In verse 18, Paul expresses his confidence. Of what is he confident?
  - f. Can you describe a time when you were content with hardship because your promised heavenly reward was more valuable than earthly troubles? Please share with your group.
  
10. Are we almost finished taking the gospel to the ends of the earth as Jesus commanded in Matt. 28:19-20 and Acts 1:8? The task of spreading the story of salvation through Jesus is nowhere near finished and more than 1900 years have passed since Jesus commissioned his followers to make disciples of all nations.
  - a. On page 3 is a chart showing the world population of 2005, broken down by world religions. Study the chart to see how close to finished the task is for evangelizing the world. Comment.
  - b. The world's Bible translation organizations are cooperating to provide God's word to every language group in the world. At the current rate of progress, the task will be completed in 2050. Worldwide today the statistics are as follows:
    - 6,912 languages in the world
    - 1,168 languages have a New Testament
    - 438 languages have the entire Bible
    - 200 million people in the world remain Bible-less

**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**

11. The unfinished task can seem overwhelming. It is a matter for earnest prayer. At the beginning of our study, in Acts 1:8 we saw how each of us have a responsibility to be witnesses to the story of Jesus in our own neighborhoods and cities, in nearby cultures, and to the ends of the earth. We have been called to a vision bigger than ourselves.
- Where were you at the beginning of the study?
  - What progress have you made since then?
  - What will be your next steps?
  - Share your concerns and decision with your group.



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Acts 1:8