

And So We Came to Rome

Acts of the Apostles, Chapters 24 through 28, The End of the Study

What We Found

Before Governor Felix, Paul spoke the sentence our whole study was named for: "according to the Way, which they call a sect, I worship the God of our fathers" (24:14). The Way is not a breakaway sect but Israel's own faith arrived at its destination, the tent of David rebuilt with the nations streaming in. Through the trials, Luke stacked exonerations, Agrippa's verdict, "this man could have been set free", while heaven kept its own decree: the chains Paul could have escaped were the ticket God booked him to Rome.

In the storm we completed a discovery begun weeks ago: Jonah, the prophet fleeing God's call to the Gentiles, brought the storm on his ship and had to be cast out for the crew to live; Paul, the prophet obeying that call, was the reason all 276 aboard were spared: "God has granted you all those who sail with you" (27:24). Acts is the book of Jonah run in reverse. And in the storm's fourteenth night, Paul took bread, gave thanks, and broke it, verbs carrying the unmistakable family resemblance of the Last Supper and Emmaus, painted over an ordinary meal, most readers judge, on purpose: hope served at table in the middle of the storm, which is what the Church has done in every storm since, and at her altar the colors are not borrowed.

Then Rome, the opened guesses, and the secret the study's cover kept for fourteen weeks. Luke's account ends without one: no verdict, no martyrdom, only two years of Paul "preaching the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ quite openly and unhindered", and in Luke's Greek, the final word of the entire book is that last adverb, *akōlytōs*, unhindered. Paul was chained; the Word was not (2 Timothy 2:9). The hero of Acts was never Peter or Paul but the risen Christ acting through His Body, and His action has no final chapter because it had not ended when Luke's ink ran out, and it has not ended now. A wall has an end; a Way goes on. Acts 29 is the history of the Church, twenty centuries in progress, and as of fourteen weeks ago, it includes this table. The book ends unhindered because it hands you the pen.

Voices of the Church

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Clement of Rome, Letter to the Corinthians, 5 (around AD 96)

Writing from Rome within living memory, Clement holds up Peter, who after many labors bore his witness and went to his place of glory, and Paul, who taught the whole world and reached the limits of the West: the martyred examples, Clement says, of his own generation, remembered by the Roman church as her own; his letter is the earliest thread in the tradition that both crowned their witness at Rome.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Irenaeus of Lyons, Against Heresies, Book III, 3.2 (2nd century)

St. Irenaeus points every seeker to the very great and very ancient Church founded and organized at Rome by the two most glorious apostles, Peter and Paul, listing her bishops by name from the apostles to his own day. With this church, on account of its preeminent authority, every church must agree.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. John Chrysostom, Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles, the final homily (4th century)

Preaching on the abrupt ending, Chrysostom says the author leaves the hearer thirsting, so that thereafter he supplies the rest by himself; for what needed to be shown was shown, that the word of God was not bound. The ending is not missing; it is delegated.

Live It, the Commissioning

Four final assignments. First, finish before the Lord: within seven days, make a visit to the Blessed Sacrament, alone, thank Him for fourteen weeks on the Way, and speak your Acts 29 sentence to Him: "I believe the Spirit is sending me to..." The study that began in an upper room should end before the tabernacle. Second, give the study away: choose the one discovery that most lit you up, the three thousand of Pentecost, the son of Jonah at Joppa, the last word of Acts, and tell it to one person outside the group this week; the Way spreads at the speed of one told story. Third, keep Sunday as Troas kept it, permanently (CCC 2177-2178). Fourth, do not scatter: hold the group to whatever next step you agreed on together. The book has no ending. Neither should this.

Memory Verse

"...preaching the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ quite openly and unhindered." (Acts 28:31)

Where the Way Goes From Here

If this study opened Acts for you, the roads out of it are many: the Letters of St. Paul, written along the very journeys you have now traveled; the Letters of St. Peter, the fisherman's own voice; or the Gospel of Luke, volume one, where every thread you traced was first spun. Ask your leader what this group walks next. The last word of Acts is not an ending. It is a permission slip.

Catechism References

CCC 834 (the Church of Rome, presiding in charity) · CCC 302-303 (providence, concrete and immediate) · CCC 2 (handing on the faith to the ends of the earth)