

An Eschatology of Acts and Beyond

Acts 28:26-31

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 1-31-2010

Introduction

John Bunyan was a tinker before he became a pastor. That's not a bad word. A tinker was a trade that didn't bring in much income. It involved being a handyman who repaired pots and pans and other household wares that were leaking or wearing out. He didn't have much education. But the moment he started to preach, thousands gathered to hear him and were transformed. With one day's notice, he could gather a crowd of 1200 people to listen to him preach at 7 am on any weekday. His preaching transfixed even great theologians. For example, when King Charles asked the famous John Owen, why he, a great scholar, would go to hear an uneducated tinker preach, John Owen said, "I would willingly exchange my learning for the tinker's power of touching men's hearts." He was turning parts of England upside down.

And then he got thrown into prison for preaching without a license. In fact, he stayed in prison for twelve years. And we might wonder, "Why would the Lord do that with such an incredibly gifted man?" If you were John Bunyan you might be tempted to think that God's power was not at work, or at least that the Gospel was going backwards and things were getting worse and worse. When you look at John's financial ruin, his sickness, his imprisonment, the thousands who were imprisoned with him, the death of his first wife (which left four children without a mom, and one girl blind), it would seem as if God's kingdom was losing. But John Bunyan did not go by appearances. He had a theology that gave him faith to know that his labors in the Lord were not in vain, even if it might look like they were in vain. And his books written during this time absolutely exude this faith. Despite darkness all around him he knew that the kingdom of light was advancing. Despite apparent setbacks, he knew that those very setbacks would advance God's kingdom invincibly because God had promised that of the increase of Christ's kingdom and of peace there would be no end (Isaiah 9:7) and that Christ would so build His church that even the gates of hell would not prevail against it (Matthew 16:18). And of course, from hindsight we see that God rewarded his faith. John Bunyan wrote *Pilgrim's Progress* in prison, and next to the Bible, it has sold more copies than any other book,

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and has impacted the lives of countless people for good. And there were other culture changing things that he did from those prison cells.

Why did God allow Paul to stay in custody for another two years? He's already been incarcerated for three years, so that makes this last imprisonment a total of five years. Why? I believe we have seen that these five years benefited Paul, benefited the church, and caused the faith to grow in the political arena. But there is another reason why this book ends with Paul in prison. I believe that it is a marvelous picture of how the kingdom grows even while giving appearances of losing. Nothing can stop its advance. That doesn't mean there won't be unbelief. Of course there will be. But I think these last few verses are a nice bookend to the eschatology that Luke begins the book of Acts with. We are going to be looking at an eschatology of Acts and beyond. This is our last sermon in the book of Acts. And I am going to be tying this together with the big picture that Paul paints in Romans 11.

I. The casting away of Israel (vv. 25-27; see Rom. 11:12,15)

Last week we started to look at the casting away of Israel in verses 25-27. Paul calls it a mystery that Israel as a nation would have blindness for a long, long time. Beginning to read at verse 25:

Acts 28:25 So when they did not agree among themselves, they departed after Paul had said one word: "The Holy Spirit spoke rightly through Isaiah the prophet to our fathers,

Acts 28:26 saying,

"Go to this people and say:

'Hearing you will hear, and shall not understand;

And seeing you will see, and not perceive;

Acts 28:27 *For the hearts of this people have grown dull.*

Their ears are hard of hearing,

And their eyes they have closed,

Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears,

Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn,

So that I should heal them."

This was Paul's final warning that in 70AD God would cast away His people if they did not repent. In Romans 11 Paul words it this way: "**Now if their fall is riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness?... For if their being cast away is the reconciling of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?**" (Rom. 11:12,15)

There are four stages to God's dealings with Israel and the Gentile world. Let me outline those for you quickly. In the Old Testament God for the most part only dealt with the nation of Israel. We aren't told why. He is sovereign, and it was His prerogative to save mainly Jews. There was a tiny remnant among the Gentiles, but even they had to become Jews, didn't they?

The second stage comes after Israel rejected her Messiah in the first century. Prophets predicted a long period of time in which blindness would happen to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles had come in. Certainly as a nation, they are completely cast away. And we looked at that last week. But this same period of time is a time when God predicts a non-stop growth of the kingdom among the Gentiles. So God is in control of the lack of growth among the Jews and the huge growth among the Gentiles. This was a part of His plan.

The third stage that Romans outlines is a day in the future in which the whole nation of Israel will become a Christian nation. That's the fullness of Israel. Right now it is a remnant. A remnant is a very small piece of cloth – not the whole cloth. But some time in the future, the whole cloth will be God's. The whole of Israel will be saved.

The fourth stage happens after Israel is converted. It is a time of unprecedented blessing in world history. People will live longer, be more united in theology, find holiness increasing, and find God's blessings in every area of life. Pre-millennialists say that this will happen after Christ's second coming, and we postmillennialists say that it will happen before the Second Coming, but we are both convinced that it will happen. This will be the time when the Deuteronomy 28 blessings will be experienced by all nations.

So in world history, remnant theology gives way to fullness theology – first the fullness of the Gentiles, then the fullness of Israel, and then even greater blessings. This is the pattern of history. So hopefully you can see the big picture that the church had already been given in Romans by the time Acts was written.

And that's kind of the paradigm we see in these verses. In verses 25-27 we see a casting away of the nation of Israel.

II. Reconciliation of the Gentiles (v. 28; see Rom. 11:12,15)

In verse 28 we see the anticipation of the reconciliation of the Gentiles. It says, **“Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!”** Notice the

words, “they *will* hear it!” It is a guarantee that the Gentiles will be converted. And not just in a small trickle. Romans 11 again:

“Now if their [that is, the Jewish nation’s] fall is riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness [He is saying that there is coming a time when Israel will also be majority converted – where the fullness of Israel will be saved. But it is saying that if before that happens, the Gentiles will experience incredible riches as a result of Israel’s failure to enter in - if that is true, how much more blessings will the Gentiles experience once Israel as a nation is converted. That’s Paul’s logic. A couple verses later Paul says, “... For if their being cast away is the reconciling of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?” This sinful world *will* be reconciled. That verse guarantees the reconciliation of the nations. But it promises something even greater once Israel is saved. This time instead of calling it even greater riches, it likens it to a resurrection from the dead. This sin cursed world will experience rejuvenation. And whether you look at that on a premil or a postmil scheme, it will be a pretty radical change.

This means that the Great Commission will not be a failed commission. The Gentiles *will* listen. Verse 28 is not contrasting the remnant of Israel with a remnant of the Gentiles. That’s the way Amillennialists see it. No – there was a remnant of both Jews and Gentile when Luke was writing. That’s not a contrast. The only contrast that works is a contrast between the *nation* of Israel being cast away, and the *nations* being reconciles. "Gentiles" simply means "nations." Can you see that?

When Jesus calls us to disciple all nations, teaching them to observe all things given in the word, He intends that commission to be fulfilled. And Jesus gave us hope that it *can* be fulfilled when He promised that all authority had been given to Him in heaven and on earth, and when He promised, **“lo I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”**

III. A remnant from the Jews anticipated (v. 29; see Rom. 9:27; 11:5,14)

So verses 25-27 speak about the rejection of the nation as a whole. Verse 28 anticipates the reception of the Gentile nations – all nations. And then verse 29 implies that even during this time when the bulk of Israel rejects the Gospels, a remnant from the Jews will always be saved.

Verse 29 says, **“And when he had said these words, the Jews departed and had a great dispute among themselves.”** That may seem

depressing – that there is a dispute. But actually, those are encouraging words. It means that there are still Jews who disagree with the majority opinion. There was still a remnant. It means that Paul’s prophecy in Romans 9-11 is already happening. As Paul worded it, **“Has God cast away His people? Certainly not! For I also am an Israelite... Even so at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace.”** (11:1,5) So even though He has cast away Israel as a nation, He has not cast away all Jews. Earlier he had said, **“Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, the remnant will be saved.”** (9:27).

But Paul’s hope is that this will change. He knows that Israel cannot be saved as a nation until the fullness of the Gentiles comes in. And that is why he works so hard at the conversion of the nations. He says in 10:1, **“Brethren my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved.”** But he goes on to say that this can’t happen until a majority in the Gentile nations are saved. So he keeps on preaching, as chapter 11:14 words it, **“If by any means I may provoke to jealousy those who are my flesh and save some of them.”** (11:14). God keeps His covenant with Abraham by making sure that there will always be at least some Jews in any given age who are genuinely converted. And that has been true over the last 2000 years. There has never been a period when there have not been some believers among the Jews. And so it encourages me when there are people like Rev. James Graveling who feel called to preach to the Jews. It’s such an important ministry. I would love to see him freed up financially to be able to do that. He is experiencing the same disputing that Paul experienced in verse 29. Why? Because God still has a remnant. And we can praise Him for that.

IV. The fullness of the Gentiles anticipated (vv. 30-31)

The victory of God is anticipated in Acts 28:30-31, at least in seed form.

Acts 28:30 ¶ Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him,

Acts 28:31 preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him.

A. The Spirit and the bride say “come” (v. 30; Rev. 22:17)

Let’s break those verses down into five parts. The first part I have labeled by the phrase in Revelation 22:17, **“the Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’”** That’s what Paul’s whole two years in this rented house were all about. Even though he was under house arrest, he could say, “Come” and people responded to the Gospel; they came and they believed. He was not

expecting the church to be extinguished prior to the Second Coming. He was expecting it to grow. So he calls them to come. And we too need to invite people to come.

B. The message of the kingdom is a message of invasion and a call to unconditional surrender (v. 31)

The second thing that I notice is that verse 31 says that he was **“preaching the kingdom of God.”** We are living in the time of the kingdom. There are a lot of people who think that the kingdom is still future. But this book begins and ends with the Gospel of the kingdom. This is not the time to survive on earth and hope we can have an escape to heaven. What does the Lord’s Prayer say? It says, **“Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”** It is a message of the invasion of heaven upon earth.

In fact, here is how dictionaries define the Greek word κηρυσσω, which is translated as “preaching.” They define it as “to herald for an army or king; to proclaim as conqueror” (Liddell & Scott). You may remember in the movie Braveheart that there was a herald who rode out onto the field with a flag to offer terms of surrender to the enemies. He was the official herald that gave this kind of κηρυσσω. It was a message of an invading army. And Paul’s message was the same as John the Baptists and Christ’s – repent and believe the good news. If you repent and surrender, good news; if not, judgment. It was a call to unconditional surrender. That’s what the last 2000 years have been all about.

C. The message of the kingdom is centered on Jesus (v. 31b)

But verse 31 makes it clear that this message of the kingdom was centered on Jesus, **“and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ...”** It was not a social Gospel devoid of the cross. Unfortunately, liberals preach, “Let’s change society,” but they leave the Gospel out. And that’s a monstrosity of a message. Nor was it a truncated Gospel that only speaks about personal transformation. Though that is much better, that too is a perversion of the Great Commission. No, the cross speaks to all of life. Paul was speaking the *whole* message Christ’s claims over *the whole* of life and His redemption of *the whole* of life. There wasn’t anything related to Jesus that Paul was leaving out, and Jesus claims all authority in heaven and earth.

D. The time of the kingdom is a time of confidence (v. 31c)

The fourth thing that I notice about this eschatology of Acts is that it is a message of confidence. He was proclaiming these things with all confidence. When you are on the losing side there is no basis for confidence, but there is every basis for confidence for believers, because we know that our labors in the Lord are not in vain. Paul told us to fight the good fight. What's a good fight? If you talk to boxers, they will tell you that the only good fight is the fight that they win, right? And Paul is confident in the victory of Christ's kingdom.

E. The advance of the kingdom cannot be stopped (v. 31d)

And then finally, it implies that the King that this herald represents cannot be stopped in His victorious advance. And I see that in the phrase, "no one forbidding him." That whole phrase is one word in the Greek: ἀκωλύτως – nothing hindering. It is more literally rendered, nothing hindering. F.F. Bruce comments on that word, saying, "Luke's final word is a legal expression; with it the record of Acts closes on a triumphant note." (p. 511). The New American Commentary says, "this final word of the text of Acts points to even more – to the unbound gospel, triumphant over every barrier of superstition and human prejudice." (p. 546). It's a wonderful conclusion to a grand book.

F. Thus Luke ends where he began – the advancement of the kingdom.

1. The answer to the apostles' question in Acts 1:6-8 is only hinted at here, but is more fully developed in Romans 9-11.

And so Luke ends his book where he began it – the advancement of the kingdom invincibly to the ends of the age. Interestingly, Luke does not directly answer the apostles' question that he began the book with. In Acts 1:6-8 the apostles ask the question, "**Will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?**" They know that only a remnant of Israel was willing to believe, but they are wondering if Christ was about to bring in the fullness of Israel. That would be exciting. And in answer, Christ doesn't deny the legitimacy of the question. It's a very legitimate question: "Will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" But instead of answering the question directly, Christ answers it the way Paul does. He simply gives the means by which the kingdom will eventually be restored to Israel – it can only happen as the Gentile nations are converted. So here's Christ's answer to their question: "**It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father**

has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

It is only when the Gospel has gone to the end of the earth that Israel as a nation will inherit the kingdom by being re-grafted back into the church. And Romans 11 says that this will result in an even greater blessing of the Gospel upon the whole world. What a wonderful picture!

2. The book is constructed to communicate the invincible advance of the kingdom

And this victory of the kingdom is hinted at in the very way the book was constructed. We started this series by pointing out that the book has six sections as the gospel goes geographically out from Jerusalem, to Judea, to Samaria, to Syria, to Europe, and all the way to Rome and beyond. And throughout these sections you have descriptions that begin with addition of thousands, and then multiplying, and then many multitudes, until Paul is accused of turning the world upside down. And when we started the book of Acts we saw that each of the six sections of this book end with a note of absolute triumph, showing how the Gospel was conquering that region and multiplying, then going on to the next region. It's giving us a hint of the constant spread of the Gospel through this age. It is also designed to show that the crushing of Rome that was prophesied in Daniel 2 would begin when Israel is cast away in the Jewish war.

And of course, that was when Nero, the beast, was killed, when Rome as an empire died, and was only later resurrected under Vespasian. But despite death throes and persecution until Constantine, the church grew so aggressively that before Constantine converted, it was estimated that over 50% of the empire was Christian. We are talking under persecution; we are talking mostly genuine believers.

O that we had the faith to conquer that Athanasius and other early fathers had! Revelation 2 says that any time the church has that kind of faith, **“to him I will give power over the nations,”** (Rev. 2:26) and in the next verse says that such men and women will be able to wield Christ's rod of iron through prayer. In other words, the last word of the book of Acts can be true of anyone who has the kind of faith that Revelation 2-3 calls for us to have as overcomers.

What an optimistic book! What a vision for the future! Now Acts is also a realistic book because it talks about persecution, prison, death, and satanic opposition. It talks about God's call for us to be willing to lay down our lives for His cause. *But what a cause it is!* It is worth laying down our

lives to see the kingdoms of this world becoming the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ. Rome eventually became a Christian empire. Think about that! Even under intense persecution, over 50% of the empire was Christian by the time Constantine got converted. Why? Because they took the Great Commission seriously, and thought they could convert the world. Just like Paul they knew that the kingdom of Christ was advancing even during those times when it looked like they were losing. They took the book of Acts seriously. And it's my prayer that each person here would commit himself and herself to living out the kingdom principles of this book and advancing His cause. The eschatology of Acts enflames my heart. It gets me excited. And I hope it has gotten you excited too.

Conclusion

But I want to end by noting that you can apply this idea of seeming defeat yet real victory to your own life, individually. Sometimes God's victory in our lives is disguised under apparent defeat. God loves to show His power in the midst of setbacks and reversals. And he loves it when we have faith and try to look for His ways of escape, that we may be able to bear it. God not only has an eschatology for this world, He has an eschatology for your life.

What is it? God's eschatology for you is not defeat, misery, hopelessness, and a guarantee that Satan will almost extinguish your faith. Far from it! It is an eschatology of victory! Think of just a sampling of personal promises that God gives to you.

**Psalms 60:12 Through God we will do valiantly,
For it is He who shall tread down our enemies.**

Daniel 11:32: "but the people who know their God shall be strong, and carry out great exploits."

That's what I want for my life. That's what I want for each of you.

Romans 12:21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

**1John 2:13: I write to you, young men,
Because you have overcome the wicked one."**

Have you learned to overcome the temptations of the wicked one? John said that the young men in his congregation had.

1John 4:4 You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.

1John 5:4 For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.

1John 5:5 Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

That victory applies to all of you.

Ephesians 3:20 ¶ Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, Ephesians 3:21 to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

He is saying that this is a personal eschatology that you can count on in any age – even all appearances to the contrary. Doesn't Romans 8 describe our victory even when appearances are to the contrary? It does!

Romans 8:35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? *Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?*

Romans 8:36 As it is written:

*“For Your sake we are killed all day long;
We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.”*

Romans 8:37 ¶ Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.

Don't give up. Don't be discouraged. Just as Christ is advancing His cause in history, He is advancing His cause in your own life. And your own life is contributing to the advance of history. Even when it looks like everything is going against you, you can be an overcomer; more than an overcomer. That's why the last two verses of 1 Corinthians 15 say

1Corinthians 15:57 But thanks *be* to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

1Corinthians 15:58 ¶ Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.

Sometimes we let obstacles, mountains, and giants in the land determine what our faith can be. But your faith is only limited by the promises of God.

Years ago I was struck by a tiny snippet that I read from a biologist who was studying the life of ants. And the part that I read was about an ant that was carrying a piece of straw that seemed way too big for the ant to carry. It came to a large crack in the earth that was too wide for the ant to cross over. It stood there for a time just as if it was thinking. It then put the straw across the crack, walked across the straw, then picked it up and was on its way again.

And what struck me is that we need to do that when we come up against things that are too great for us to handle. When we come to a crack in our road that seems impossible, we need to put the straw of God's promises down across that crack, be willing to walk across it by faith, and ask God to come through for us as we persevere.

Man's biggest burdens that we shrink from often become the very vehicle for our progress. If Luther had not been holed up in hiding in Wartburg Castle, he may never have had the time to translate the Bible into German – a remarkable feat that catapulted the Reformation forward. Instead of getting frustrated with his imprisonment, he took it as an opportunity, put a straw down, and climbed over the crack so that he triumphed in the face of defeat.

Had Helen Keller not been blind, we may never have gotten the huge volume of hymns from her hand. If Fredrick Robertson had gotten his coveted commission in the British army, he would never have become the powerful preacher that he became. If John Bunyan had not been put into prison, his Pilgrim's Progress would likely not have blessed the lives of millions. If Paul had not been put in house arrest for two years in Rome, the seeds of Rome's eventual fall to the Gospel may not have been laid.

What we can count on as we continue to live out Acts 29, and 30 and 40 and 100 in our own generation is that absolutely everything – even our times of arrest are not in vain. And so I want to end this series with the last verse of 1Corinthians 15: **“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.”** Can you believe that? Luke ends this book with the word “nothing hindering” so that we might have confidence that nothing can hinder God's kingdom in the hands of those who have faith. Amen. Let's pray

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Introduction

- How was John Bunyan's apparent "defeat" turned into a real victory?
- Who benefited from Paul's five years of imprisonment?

I. The casting away of Israel (vv. 25-27; see Rom. 11:12,15)

- What are the four stages of God's plan for Israel and the nations?

II. Reconciliation of the Gentiles (v. 28; see Rom. 11:12,15)

- If the "remnant" of Israel was saved and the "fullness" of the nation was cast away (see Rom. 11), what will Israel's "fullness" be? (Rom 11:12)
- If a remnant of Gentiles is now being saved, what will be the Gentile fullness?
- How extensive is Christ's authority now (Matt 28:18-20)?
- Based on that authority, what does the Great Commission command us to do to the nations?

III. A remnant from the Jews anticipated (v. 29; see Rom. 9:27; 11:5,14)

- Why will there always be a time when at least some Jews are Christians?

IV. The fullness of the Gentiles anticipated (vv. 30-31)

A. The Spirit and the bride say "come" (v. 30; Rev. 22:17)

- As part of the bride, are we saying "Come!" like the apostle did? How can you be better at that?
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B. The message of the kingdom is a message of invasion and a call to unconditional surrender (v. 31)

- What does the Greek word κηρυσσω imply?
- From where does the invasion of earth come if Paul was the "herald" of this kingdom?

C. The message of the kingdom is centered on Jesus (v. 31b)

- Why is this absolutely critical?
- What "gospel" has ignored this truth?

D. The time of the kingdom is a time of confidence (v. 31c)

- Why can you too be confident?

E. The advance of the kingdom cannot be stopped (v. 31d)

F. Thus Luke ends where he began – the advancement of the kingdom.

1. The answer to the apostles' question in Acts 1:6-8 is only hinted at here, but is more fully developed in Romans 9-11.
2. The book is constructed to communicate the invincible advance of the kingdom

Conclusion

- Write down one of the verses that pastor Kayser read that shows that we can individually have an eschatology of victory, even in the face of apparent defeat: