

October 26, 2025

Group Study: The Ends of the Earth (Acts 28:23-31)

1. Why do you think Luke ends the Book of Acts with Paul in house arrest, rather than recording the outcome of his trial? Does this ending change the way you think about the rest of Acts?
2. How does Acts 28 emphasize the unhindered spread of the gospel despite obstacles?
3. What does it mean that the gospel is “for all – Jew and Gentile alike”? How might the same idea be applied in your own community?
4. Where do you see the Holy Spirit moving “unhinderedly” in the world today?
5. What does it mean for us to carry the gospel “to the ends of the earth” in our local context?

Good Faith Bible Study

Kathy and Nathan Maxwell

October 26, 2025

“The Ends of the Earth”

Focal Text: Acts 28:23-31

<https://goodfaithmedia.org/bible-studies>

If you were writing the story of the end of the early church, how would you end it? Maybe with a great victory. A crowd of converts, a temple full with praise, or maybe Paul standing triumphantly before Caesar.

But that’s not how Luke ends Acts. This is the part of the Book of Acts that we’ll look at this coming week. Instead, Luke closes with a man under house arrest, chained to a Roman guard, probably renting a small apartment, and waiting for a trial that never comes. It’s not exactly the cinematic finish we might expect.

And yet, Luke ends his story with this strange little word: Translated into English, it means “without hindrance.” Paul, confined and constrained in Rome, is preaching “unhinderedly.”

Why would Luke end a story about movement ... with a man who can't go anywhere?

From the beginning, Acts has been a book in motion. Jesus tells the disciples at the very beginning of the book in Acts 1:8, “You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

As the story unfolds, that promise kind of becomes a map. The gospel moves from Jerusalem, through Judea and Samaria, across seas and empires. It finally makes its way all the way to Rome, the so-called “navel of the world,” the center of civilization.

For Luke's audience, Rome wasn't the end of the earth, it was the middle. But for Luke, that is exactly the right place to stop. Because once the gospel reaches Rome, it can go everywhere. Merchants, soldiers, immigrants, exiles will carry the gospel even farther, beyond the edges of the map.

So Luke ends his story here, not because the story is over, but because the gospel has now taken on a life of its own.

It's really interesting to take a map of the ancient Mediterranean world and plot the movement of the Holy Spirit that is traced in the Book of Acts. You might get a hold of a map yourself and try this. You're probably already familiar with the map that you can find in the back of your Bible that traces the missionary journeys of Paul. But even before we get to Acts 13, we can see that the gospel is already on the move.

The story in Acts starts with a frightened group of disciples hidden in an upper room—the first point on our map is Jerusalem. And then from Acts chapter 2, skim ahead. Where does the next part of the story take place? And the next?

It's also interesting to note where—geographically speaking—Luke's story slows down. Does it spread to cover all of the map you're looking at? Were there places where Luke's story does not take us?

goodfaith

MAGAZINE

There are, aren't there? And when we take the time to read about what happens in all of the locations mentioned in Luke's story, we realize that over and over again, the work of God's Spirit is met with resistance. Luke's ending forces us to wrestle with a big question: If the gospel moves "unhinderedly," why does it look so hindered?

Here's where two terms can help us think about this more deeply: "proximate hindrances" and "ultimate hindrances." You might have encountered terms like this in discussions about biology or psychology or sociology. But let's borrow them for a moment to think about the Book of Acts.

We might think of proximate hindrances in the Book of Acts as the visible, immediate obstacles that slow things down. In the story of these early followers of Jesus, proximate hindrances are events like imprisonment or persecution, exhaustion, bureaucracy, lack of money, or maybe cultural understanding or language barriers.

But ultimate hindrances run deeper. They are the spiritual or the systemic barriers that work beneath the surface. And it's interesting: When we compare the first-century church with our own faith communities, these ultimate hindrances might sound familiar: fear, cynicism, prejudice, empire, hopelessness.

We could think of the "ultimate" hindrances as the root, or the cause, or the systemic environment that leads to "proximate" hindrances.

Paul's chains, for example—they were a proximate hindrance in Acts 28. His confinement kept him from traveling. But if Paul had lost hope, if he had started to believe that the Spirit could no longer work through him, well, that would have been an ultimate hindrance.

And yet, Paul refuses to give in to despair. Even from his confinement, he welcomes, Luke says, "all who come to him," proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about Jesus "with all boldness."

Let's take a minute to think about our own context. What feels like a proximate hindrance in your community's ministry right now? And on the other hand, what might be an ultimate hindrance—something that threatens our faith or our imagination for how God is working in the world?

As you reflect on these questions, notice the differences in your answers. Some obstacles we can tackle directly. But others call for more spiritual resilience and a communal faith. Sometimes seeing a contrast in the kinds of challenges we face can help us focus on working toward a faithful solution.

In the face of hindrances, there is always hope. After all, Acts is, at its core, a story of the Spirit finding a way.

- When religious authorities resist, the Spirit sends the message to the Gentiles.
- When persecution breaks out, the believers scatter ... and the gospel spreads even faster.
- When Peter and John are imprisoned, their guards become their audience.
- And in Rome, Paul's small, rented room becomes a sanctuary, a place of welcome and teaching and hope.

The presence of God is not limited by circumstance.

Where have you seen the Spirit creating unexpected spaces for the gospel to move and grow? Maybe it's in a workplace or in a hospital room. Maybe it's even in an online space.

The presence of God is not limited by circumstance.

There's another contrast to notice here, at the end of Luke's story. The contrast between the Roman Empire and the Kingdom, or the "kin-dom," of God.

Rome called itself the "navel of the universe." In the first-century Mediterranean world, Rome was the center of power and trade and control. But Luke flips that image. The place that claims to be the center becomes, in God's story, the ends of the earth.

Empire depends on force and domination. But God's community depends on welcome and presence.

Paul's little apartment in Rome is no throne room, but it's where the reign of God is most visible: open doors, shared meals, unhindered grace.

Paul's living quarters probably don't look like much, but it turned out it was a holy space.

goodfaith

MAGAZINE

What might “kingdom space” look like in your own church or in your neighborhood? Is there a place where hospitality replaces hierarchy, where the gospel moves freely, even in small and ordinary settings?

These sacred pockets are there, but they’re often not where we expect to find them. Because “the ends of the earth” isn’t just about geography. It’s also about the ends of ourselves.

Sometimes the Spirit leads us right up to the edge of what we can control, what we can plan, or even what we feel like we can believe. It’s in those boundary places that God often does something new.

The Book of Acts doesn’t end because the story isn’t finished. The Spirit’s work continues through the generations, through us, through you.

So where might the Spirit be calling you beyond what’s comfortable? Are you being drawn by the Spirit of God to a new “ends of the earth”? Maybe it is a new geographical space (which, you know, could be just right across town). Or maybe it’s a new relationship, or maybe even a new task, a new vocation. Let’s not forget, though, that at the end of Acts, Paul is staying put—he’s not moving on to something new. He’s expanding the reach of the gospel, right where he’s at. That’s worth noticing.

Luke’s final word still echoes: unhinderedly.

Even in confinement, Paul’s faith is free. Even in limitation, the Spirit moves.

So maybe the question for us is this: What would it mean for our community to live unhinderedly? To trust that the gospel keeps finding ways to move through love and courage and ordinary acts of welcome?

Here’s my challenge to you this week: Before you go to your Bible study, find one way to “live unhinderedly.” Bring that story with you. It will encourage your friends that you find there.

goodfaith

MAGAZINE

May we, like Paul, welcome all who come to us, without fear, without bitterness and without hindrance. And may the Spirit of God move through us unhinderedly, to the very ends of the earth.