

Having arrived in Rome one of the first things Paul does is speak to the Jewish leaders. Verses 17-29 contain three parts: Paul gathered the Jews together (vv17-22); he spoke to them for a full day (v23); and they responded in various ways (vv24-29).

I. He Gathered Them (vv17-22)

II. He Addressed Them (v23)

III. He Offended Them (vv24-29)

I. He Gathered Them (vv17-22)

1. V17—"And it came to pass after three days that Paul called the leaders of the Jews together"—these were the Jewish leaders in Rome.
2. We know from history that Jews had come to Rome 100 years before (largely for economic reasons).
3. They no doubt had many synagogues throughout the city and likely even established a ruling body over them.
4. Thus, having called these leaders to himself, Paul explains how he came to Rome, v17b—"Men and brethren, though I have done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers, yet I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans."
5. Verses 18-19—"who, when they had examined me, wanted to let me go, because there was no cause for putting me to death. But when the Jews spoke against it, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar, not that I had anything of which to accuse my nation."
6. Paul makes one thing very clear—he was innocent of any charges against the Jewish people or customs.
7. This of course were the false charges levelled against him by the Jews (that he spoke against the OT).
8. Put this wasn't true, as he rightly interpreted the OT as it foretold the coming Messiah and His salvation.
9. V20—"For this reason therefore I have called for you, to see you and speak with you, because for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain."
10. By "hope of Israel" he meant the Messiah and his salvation—this is what Israel had always hoped for.
11. The problem was the majority of first century Jews didn't want salvation from sin but from the Romans.
12. It's for this reason, they stumbled over the humility of Christ and the fact that His kingdom was not of this world.
13. Thus, Paul is basically saying—he's imprisoned for simply believing what the OT taught about the Messiah.
14. John Stott—"Thus, Paul had done nothing against the Jews, the Romans had nothing against him, and he had nothing against the Jews. It was in order to clarify these points that he had asked to see them. He was in every way a loyal Jew; indeed it was because of the hope of Israel, Israel's Messianic expectation fulfilled in Jesus, that he was a prisoner."
15. V21—"Then they said to him, 'We neither received letters from Judea concerning you, nor have any of the brethren who came reported or spoken any evil of you.'"
16. We've never heard anything about you (either from letters from Jerusalem or from word of mouth by those who've come from Jerusalem).

17. V22—"But we desire to hear from you what you think; for concerning this sect, we know that it is spoken against everywhere."
18. While they've never heard about Paul himself, they have heard about the Christian sect called "the way."
19. They no doubt have heard about Christ and those who've believed on him (sometimes called Christians).
20. They were likely familiar with the church at Rome, though it seems they had little interaction with it.
21. Now as I've said, while we know the Jews came to Rome about 100yrs before, we are not sure when Christians came.
22. Most suggest the church was started by Jewish converts who were saved in Jerusalem at the Day of Pentecost.
23. If you remember, we learned from Acts 2 that Jews came to Jerusalem from all over the world for Pentecost.
24. And so it seems likely, that Jews who came to Jerusalem from Rome became Christians and then returned to Rome.
25. If so, this would have been almost 30 years before and would render the church at Rome one of the earliest churches formed.

II. He Addressed Them (v23)

1. Having agreed to speak to him further, they returned to his lodging on an appointed day (remember, he's on house-arrest).
2. V23—"So when they had appointed him a day, many came to him at his lodging, to whom he explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening."
3. Luke basically summarizes the content of Paul's discussion, which took place "from morning till evening."
4. (1) The kingdom of God—"he explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God"—God's rule on earth.
5. It was never a question whether God ruled over all things (every Jew would have believed this)—the kingdom here refers to a specific aspect of His rule.
6. To be specific, it refers to God's kingdom on earth—in the OT that rule was within the nation of Israel.
7. The nation of Israel was the kingdom of God on earth in which (or over which) God sovereignly ruled.
8. The same is true in the NT with respect to the church which is the kingdom of God in earth over which Christ rules.
9. Thus, the kingdom of God that Paul explained and solemnly testified of was the Messianic Kingdom.
10. (2) The Messiah of God—"persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets."
11. In other words, he sought to persuade them from the entire OT scriptures, that Jesus is the promised Messiah (king).
12. (a) Prophecies—the OT Scriptures are filled with predictions and/or promises of Christ coming as a King (**Isa.9:6-7**).

13. (b) Pictures—the OT Scriptures are filled with pictures of Christ as found in people like David and Solomon.
14. And thus, the entire OT, the Law of Moses and the Prophets, foretold Christ and His kingdom **(Lk.1:31-33)**.

III. He Offended Them (vv24-29)

1. V24—"And some were persuaded by the things which were spoken, and some disbelieved"—that is, some believed what Paul said and others rejected it.
2. This led Paul, according to v25, to quote and apply a passage from Isaiah to those who refused to believe.
3. V25—"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, saying.'"
4. He then quotes Isaiah 6:9-10, and then says, v28—"Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it."
5. Thus, when Luke says in v25 "they departed after Paul had said one word" he refers to verses 26-28.
6. Having had Isaiah 6:9-10 applied to them, and then having heard his statement in v28, many of them left offended.
7. V29—"And when he had said these words, the Jews departed and had a great dispute among themselves."
8. This brings me to say a few words about vv26-27 (which as I've already said is a quotation of Isaiah 6:9-10) (notice three things about this condition as described in vv26-27).
9. (1) It was national, v26—"Go to this people and say: 'Hearing you will hear, and shall not understand; and seeing you will see, and not perceive.'"
10. As I've mentioned, this passage is originally found back in Isaiah 6, when God called Isaiah to the prophetic office.
11. Isa.6:8—"Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?' Then I said, 'Here am I! Send me'"—v9—"And He said, 'Go, and tell this people.'"
12. If you recall, Isaiah was an eighth century prophet who was sent to minister to the Southern Kingdom of Judah.
13. Because of their continued rebellion, Isaiah foretold the destruction of Israel by the Assyrians (which happened in his lifetime), and the destruction of Judah by the Babylonians (which happened 150-yrs later) (He also foretold of their recovery in the coming of the Messiah).
14. Thus, the people to which Isaiah was sent were a rebellious people who refused to obey the word of God.
15. This is why Paul quotes and applies this passage to the Jewish leaders of his day—they were just like the generation of Isaiah's day.
16. Even though the Jews heard the truth they failed to understand it from the heart or to truly perceive it.
17. It was ever and always before them—they had the Law of Moses and the Prophets and yet they were blind (this was a national blindness).
18. John Dick—"Jesus Christ, in His humble form, had no attractions for men, who desired nothing so much as the honors and pleasures of the world. They would not believe that He was the Messiah, be-

cause they were displeased with the lowliness of His character and the spiritual salvation which he offered to bestow."

19. (2) It was willful, v27—"For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed."
20. The Greek word rendered "have grown dull" (NKJV) literally means "to make thick, fat, or callous."
21. The reason is then given—"their ears are hard of hearing and their eyes they have closed"—they have closed their ears and eyes.
22. The NT Scriptures quote Isaiah 6:9-10, a total of six times (Matt.13:14-15; Mk.4:11-12; Lk.8:10; Jn.12:40; Acts 28:26-27; Rom.11:7-10) (all of which are applied to the unbelieving nation of Israel).
23. But if we were to carefully consider these five passages we would find a subtle but important difference.
24. Half of the time they speak about God hardening their hearts and the other half describe them as hardening themselves.
25. And the reason being, these speak of the same thing—God hardens them because they harden themselves.
26. Or put another way, because they refuse to believe, God gives them over to themselves, whereby they are hardened.
27. Thus, God never has to do anything to man to harden him, he only has to leave him to harden himself.
28. Isa.6:9—"And He said, 'Go, and tell this people: 'Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive.' Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and return and be healed."
29. Now, if you notice, Isaiah is actually told to "make the heart of this people dull, their ears deaf, and eyes blind.
30. This doesn't mean Isaiah had the power to do this—their hearts were already dull, their ears deaf, and eyes blind.
31. But Isaiah's ministry would actually have a negative impact upon the people as it would harden their hearts further.
32. You see the word of God will have one of two results—it will either soften hearts or it will harden hearts.
33. In the case of a rebellious people (whose hearts are already hard), when they hear the truth they harden themselves further.
34. So it's not that God, the word, or Isaiah had to do anything to them to harden them, God simply leaves them to themselves.
35. Man by nature is such a wicked creature, that left to himself, he will always harden him against the truth.
36. Thus, as a just judgment, God leaves a people to themselves, who will then further harden themselves.
37. (3) It was tragic, v27b—"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."
38. Because they refused to hear, see, and understand, they refused to turn to God in order to be healed (cured).

39. This wasn't true of all the Jews, for we are expressly told in v24—"And some were persuaded by the things which were spoken."
40. But tragically it was true of the nation as a whole, who refused to believe that Christ was the Messiah.
41. They refused to believe they needed deliverance from sin and that Christ came as a greater than Moses.
42. V28—"Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it."
43. While it's true majority of the Jews refused to hear it, the same message was already being sent to the Gentiles.
44. It was spreading across the known world, and tens of thousands of Gentiles were hearing and believing it.
45. V29—"And when he had said these words, the Jews departed and had a great dispute among themselves."
46. That is, those who believed disputed with those who disbelieved—there was a strong divide within them.

IV. Observations

1. Here I want to use our last few minutes and suggest three broad observations taken from Paul's quotation of Isaiah 6:9-10.
2. (1) Left to himself man is self-destructive—I take this from the fact that the Jews plugged their ears and closing their eyes to the truth.
3. God never does anything within man to cause him to disbelieve the gospel or rebel against God and His word.
4. It all comes from within and is native to man—all God has to do is leave man to himself and do nothing.
5. Let me illustrate it this way—think of a ball rolling downhill—you don't have to do anything to the ball other than leave it alone.
6. Unless you stop the ball or put something in its path, it will continue to roll downhill all by itself (you don't have to help it).
7. And this is true of native man—his heart is already opposed to the truth and refuses to believe or embrace it.
8. Thus, here I want to digress for a few minutes and answer the question—why is man, if left to himself, self-destructive?
9. (a) Because of what he hates, Jn.3:20—"For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed."
10. (b) Because of what he seeks, Jn.5:44—"How can you believe, who receive honor from one another, and do not seek the honor that comes from the only God?"
11. As man is born into the world, the world is born into him, and so he seeks after the things of this life.
12. (c) Because of who he serves, 2Cor.4:4—"our gospel is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, should shine on them."

13. Satan blinds them with other things—either the shining things of this world or else perversions of truth.
14. (2) The word of God softens or hardens—people do not sit under the word of God and remain the same.
15. You've heard it said, and rightly so, that the same sun which melts wax is the same sun that hardens clay.
16. Lk.8:18—"Therefore take heed how you hear. For whoever has, to him more will be given; and whoever does not have, even what he seems to have will be taken from him."
17. That is, those convictions and concerns that you once had, will be lessened until one day they are gone.
18. To change the imagery—while God knocks on doors through the word, if the sinner willfully ignores it, He may no longer pound on the door and instead merely tap, and eventually altogether cease.
19. Heb.3:15—"Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion"—as Israel did in the wilderness.
20. Do not stop your ears and close your eyes—this is how our hearts are hardened—our ears and eyes are gates into our hearts.
21. My wife was very thick curtains in our living room (if closed keep the entire room dark regardless of the time of day).
22. Thus, what God is saying is rather simply—if you would hear His word do not listen to it with the curtains closed (but open your ears and eyes to let the light shine in – that your heart would be melted and not hardened).
23. (3) The gospel alone can heal our hearts—the Scripture likens Christ to a physician and the gospel to a cure.
24. And there's not another physician or cure that call sin-sick hearts than Christ and the power of the gospel.
25. The only thing necessary is that you own yourself as sick, for only the sick need a physician (Mk.2:17 – 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance').