

NO PLACE LEFT

FINISH LINE METRICS SOURCED IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Acts 20:3 – “*where he stayed for three months...*”

Mark it down. Acts 20:3 may be the most significant verse in Acts for building New Testament mission strategy. Granted, on the surface it deserves only a passing glance, but with a little digging it blossoms as a finish line, serves us a menu for key results in mission, and provides a bookend in the provincial Pauline odyssey recorded in three journeys across the book of Acts. That is quite a punch for a passing reference!

The importance of Acts 20:3 becomes clear in Romans 15 and 16 when we consider the evidence that Romans was written from Corinth near the completion of Paul’s “third missionary journey”:

- Romans 16:1-2: Paul gave his letter (Romans) to Phoebe, ‘a servant of the church in Cenchreae.’ Cenchreae was a town on the coast just 15 kilometers from Corinth.¹
- Romans 15:25-26: Paul had the Jerusalem offering in hand, perhaps the one he had admonished the Corinthians to make ready (2 Cor. 8:1-15).²
- Romans 16:23: Gaius and Erastus were from the city of Corinth.³

Identifying the writing of Romans in the timeline of Acts may seem only an academic exercise, but linking Acts 20 with Romans provides the context for Paul’s incredible statement in Romans 15 that there was no place left for him to work:

“I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the

Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done—by the power of signs and wonders, through the power of the Spirit of God. So from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ. It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ is not known, so that I would not be building on someone else’s foundation... But now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions, and since I have been longing for many years to visit you, I plan to do so when I go to Spain...” (Romans 15:18-24).

These remarkable statements led us to ask several crucial questions:

- How could Paul claim there was “no place left” to work?
- What had Paul accomplished by Acts 20:3?
- Could Acts 20 and Romans 15 provide clues for when to exit fields?

AN INVITATION TO SELF DISCOVERY

The following studies shape our understanding and vision casting for “No Place Left.”

Encourage your church planting team or partners to gather around these studies.

From Jerusalem to Illyricum in 15 years, is this possible?

Why would the Holy Spirit record this case study if it were not?


We, today’s readers of the New Testament, can find confidence in pursuing the same agenda—a life spent

engaging new fields, sowing the gospel message, nurturing new growth through a commitment to discipleship and bundling the harvest through church formation. This scriptural process, resulting in local “elder/overseers,” carries potential for multiplication.

Final questions for your team to consider:

1. How do Paul’s priorities compare with the vision and focus of your team?
2. What priorities of Paul are you considering for the first time?
3. How does Paul’s claim that “now there is no place left” fit with the key results you are pursuing?
4. Are you able to trust the Spirit of God for similar results today?

5. Can the book of Acts and the Epistles guide mission strategy today?
6. How will your ministry focus, vision or key results need to be adjusted based on Paul’s testimony?

What fields has the Lord assigned to you? May there be “no place left!” 

¹ Paul, Apostle of the Heart Set Free, by F.F. Bruce. (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1977) pp. 338-384.

² The Message of Acts, by John Stott. (Leicester, InterVarsity Press, 1990) pp. 316-319.

³ Paul, His Life and Teaching, by John McRay. (Grand Rapids, Baker, 2003), p. 77

⁴ These studies are further developed in The Four Fields of Kingdom Growth, by Nathan and Kari Shank, 2014. pp. 143-151. [Movements.net/4_fields_manual_shank](#)

SELF-DISCOVERY STUDIES

WHAT HAD BEEN ACCOMPLISHED BY ACTS 20:3?

Discuss these questions for each of the following passages:

- What was the Spirit’s role?
- What fields had been engaged?
- Was the gospel shared? If so, to what effect?
- Were disciples made? Were churches formed?
- Where did leaders emerge?
- Was there evidence of reproduction?

Acts 8:1–12:25: Post-Jerusalem scattering—Pre–Antioch sending

Acts 13:1–14:28: 1st journey

Acts 15:36–18:22: 2nd Journey

Acts 18:23–21:16: 3rd journey

CONSTRUCTING PAUL’S TIMELINE

What can be discerned from Acts and the Epistles concerning Paul’s timeline?

AD 35

AD 64



Discuss the following passages to re-create Paul’s timeline: Acts 9, Gal. 1–2, Acts 13–20, 24:27, 28:30.

Note: We used AD 35 for Paul’s conversion as the beginning of our timeline, and AD 64—the start of Nero’s persecution (not recorded in Acts 28:31)—as the end. Try working forward

NOW, THEN, THERE IS NO PLACE LEFT!

Consider Romans 15:18–23. What evidence does Paul give that his role is finished? Based on your own study of Paul’s journeys and timeline, what had been accomplished by Acts 20:3?

1. Had the fields been engaged? (Rom. 15:19)
2. Had the gospel been proclaimed with integrity? (Rom. 15:19)
3. Had disciples demonstrated obedience? (Rom. 15:18)
4. Had churches been formed by Acts 20:3? What evidence did you find?
5. Had leaders emerged from the provincial harvest fields? (Acts 20:4-5)
6. What evidence of reproduction existed in each province?

Acts 13:49, 14:6, 16:4–5, 18:23, 1 Thess. 1:6–8, 2 Cor. 1:1, Acts 19:10.