



"REASONS TO REJOICE"

"Your Words were found and I ate them, and Your Word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart." Jeremiah 15:16

"RIDING THROUGH"

THE BOOK OF ACTS-LESSON 25

At the end of chapter 24, Felix is removed from office. He had kept Paul in prison for two full years! When he leaves, instead of releasing him, he decides to keep Paul there to make the Jews happy. (What a nice guy, huh?) In chapter 25, we meet Porcius Festus, the new man on the block. This governor didn't have much knowledge of Jesus, or what Paul was even talking about (Acts 25:20). Don't worry folks ... he will soon!

I wonder what Paul is doing? I'm sure he's still waiting and trusting in God's perfect timing. I wonder what he does to fill his time? What do you think?

First Day

1. Read Acts 25:1-27. As you read, write down any questions that come to your mind. (new words, people, etc.)
2. Did you find any key words or phrases? What is the main thought or verse in this chapter?
3. Answer the following questions:
 - a. Who are the main characters? What do we know about them?
 - b. Where is this taking place?

- c. Where is Paul? How long had he been there? (Acts 24:27)

- d. In your own words, describe what is happening.

- e. Briefly explain why Paul is in prison.

This story reminds me of Joseph's life. Joseph had one "bad" thing happen to him after another! Because of jealousy, Joseph was sold by his brothers to the Ishmalites, for 20 shekels of silver (Genesis 37:28). Joseph was taken to Egypt and sold to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh and captain of the guard (Genesis 37:36). Joseph found favor in Potiphar's sight and was made the overseer of his house (Genesis 39:4). Then came trouble ...

4. Read Genesis chapters 39-41 and answer the following questions:

- a. What was Joseph accused of?
- b. Was he guilty?
- c. What did Potiphar do to him?
- d. How long was he left in prison?
- e. Was Joseph rebellious while in prison?
- f. Why was he left there so long?
- g. Read Genesis 50:20. What was Joseph's attitude about everything that happened in his life?

Genesis 50:20 is one Scripture that never ceases to amaze me. What a comfort this brings to my heart! (I would use this verse in every lesson if I could!) I believe that Paul had the same attitude about the trials and circumstances in his life. And that attitude enabled him to face the hard times he found himself up against. His trust in the sovereignty of God was phenomenal!

5. Let's end with one last question: How do you respond when you are falsely accused? Think about it!

Memory Verse of the Week: "But as for me, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people."
Genesis 50:20

Second Day

Review your memory verse.

1. Read Acts 25:1-5.

Festus becomes the governor of the province of Syria at the age of 70. The first thing that he does when he assumes office is make a trip to Jerusalem, the ancient capital of Judea, and the center of the religious life of the Jews. This was a good move for Festus. He needed to establish some sort of working relationship with the Sanhedrin and the high priest if he wanted to see any measure of success during his reign.

The Romans valued "peace and justice." No doubt Festus had been warned about the Jews. They were known as "turbulent, fanatical, and virtually ungovernable." (Phillips) They were obviously very touchy about their religion, and it would be a wise move by Festus to get on good terms with them.

2. What was the first thing the Jews asked Festus to do?
3. Read Acts 23:12-15. Does this plan sound familiar? Did it work before?
4. What does this tell us about the spiritual condition of the Jewish people?

It's amazing that after two years, these Jews are still so angry about Paul. He's been locked away in prison, but yet they still are harboring such hatred toward him.

5. What happens to our heart when we harbor anger towards someone? What can we learn from these Jews? What can bitterness cause us to do?

6. How were the Jews taking advantage of Festus? What were they counting on?

Now Festus was in a predicament. What should he do?

7. Discuss the dilemma that Festus faced. What could happen if he went along with their plan? What could happen if he didn't? (Remember that Paul was a Roman citizen.)

8. What did Festus decide to do?

Festus stood his ground. He didn't give in to the pressure from the Jews. He also bought himself some time to look into the case by inviting them to come down to Caesarea. To him this was probably the logical place to try the case, seeing that Caesarea was the recognized seat of the Roman law.

We can sense an urgency in Festus to get to the bottom of this matter. I'm sure that Paul was happy about that!

9. The Jews hated Paul with a passion. Define the word "hate." What are we supposed to hate? What are we not supposed to hate? Give Scriptures to support your answers.

10. Is there "hate" in your heart for anyone? Has it been there for a long time? What do you need to do with that hate, regardless of whether or not you think it's justified? Read Matthew 5:43-48. What does Jesus say to do to those who have wronged you?
11. Read John 15:18-25. What does Jesus say about being "hated"?
12. Why will the world hate us? Be specific.
13. Are you willing to accept this? Are you willing to be hated for the cause of Christ? Are you willing to be set apart from this world and stand for righteousness?

We are called to hate evil, and often the world resents this. Many are choosing to embrace the evils the world has to offer them, and they don't want Christians telling them that they are wrong.

Paul's hate for evil and love for God propelled him to strive for holiness. Are you doing the same?

14. What does Jesus say in John 16:33 to encourage the disciples? How does this encourage you?

This ends our lesson for today. Can you "**rejoice**" with me that there will be an end to all this hate? Jesus did overcome the world, and soon He'll be back for us to take us home! Maranatha! Let your love for our precious Lord propel you to strive after holiness like Paul!

Third Day

Review your memory verse. Are you applying it?

Paul finally gets to face the court again. What he encounters is nothing new -- lies, half-truths, and trumped-up accusations.

1. Read Acts 25:1-12. Reread verses 6-12.
2. How long did Festus stay in Jerusalem? What did he do as soon as he returned to Caesarea?
3. What did the Jews accuse him of? Read Acts 24:5-6 to refresh your memory.
4. Could they prove these charges?
5. How did Paul reply?
6. What did Festus propose to Paul? How was he doing the Jews a favor? How would he be doing himself a favor?
7. Could Paul expect a fair trial in Jerusalem, even if Festus tried him there? Why or why not?

Festus may have believed that the more serious charges against Paul were of a religious matter, and sending him to Jerusalem would be the logical thing to do. He may have had other motives.

8. How could it benefit Festus to get the case moved to Jerusalem?
9. What was Paul's reply to this? (vs 10-11)

A Roman judge could not move a case to another court without the consent of the accused. Also, if a Roman citizen felt that he was not getting justice in a provincial court, he could appeal to the emperor. Only if a man was a murderer, a pirate, or a bandit caught in the act, was the appeal invalid (William Barclay). Festus was obliged to grant Paul his wish. This removed the matter from Jewish influence entirely.

10. Why did Paul appeal to Caesar? Was this a wise decision, or a hasty one?

Some accuse Paul of showing a lack of faithfulness by appealing to Caesar rather than trusting God. I believe that Paul again acted by the leading of the Holy Spirit. He had been in prison for 2 years, having much opportunity to pray about every course of action. He did nothing unethical, illegal, or immoral. I believe he was exercising the gift of wisdom, obviously given to him by the Holy Spirit.

11. What effect do you think Paul's request for an appeal had on Festus? How do you think he felt at that point? Relieved? Embarrassed? Angry?

This Caesar that Paul appealed to was Nero. Nero was one of the most evil men ever in office. But this was at the beginning of his reign, and he had not yet shown his true colors. At this point, it is said that "he never missed an opportunity of being gracious or merciful, or of showing what a good companion he was." Nero's reign was from A.D. 54-59. Soon he would be responsible for the burning of Rome, the burning of Christians, and many other cruelties.

12. Do you think that Festus was attracted to God by the behavior of the Jews? (I bet he was glad to be a Roman!)

13. How does question 12 speak to your heart, concerning your witness to those around you? Are your unbelieving family and friends attracted to God by your behavior? Do they want to know your God by watching how you are handling disagreements and other situations in your life? Ask God to search your heart and reveal any behavior that would cause others to say, "If that's Christianity, I don't want it!"

This ends our lesson for today. What is your "Reason to Rejoice" today? Mine is that God wants to use us to draw people to Him. What a responsibility, but, oh, what a privilege!

Fourth Day

Review your memory verse. Share it with your family today. How does it apply to your family situation today?

As Paul is presented before Festus, he has already penned his letter to the Romans. He is now living proof of Romans 8:28. Paul not only used it in his counsel and advice to others, he lived it. Do you?

1. Read Acts 25:13-22
2. Who came to visit? (vs 13)

Who is this King Agrippa? He is Herod Agrippa II, the Jewish ruler of a small territory northeast of Palestine. He had two sisters, Drusilla and Bernice. Bernice had been married to Agrippa's predecessor and uncle, King Herod of Chalcis. Upon her husband's death, Bernice lived with Herod Agrippa II, in what was rumored to be an incestuous relationship. Later she had another short marriage, and later still was openly mistress of Titus when he became Roman Emperor. She has been described as a "Jewish Cleopatra on a small scale". In her favor, it should be said that she risked her life to intercede for the Jews when the brutal procurator Gessius Florus was bent on massacre in Jerusalem. (William Neil, Acts of the Apostles)

It would be a normal occurrence for Agrippa to come and pay his respects to the new governor. It was like a courtesy call from one neighboring ruler to another.

3. Why do you think that Festus brings up Paul's case to Agrippa?

4. Does he give an accurate presentation of the case?

Festus reveals just how little he knows about Jewish affairs, and the new Christian movement. He was unprepared and unqualified to handle this matter. Herod, being part Jew, would know more about what was going on. Remember that it was Herod's great grandfather who was responsible for trying to destroy Jesus at the time of His birth. His great uncle was the one who beheaded John the Baptist, and his father ordered the execution of James and imprisoned Peter, hoping to execute him also. (But God sprung him in Acts 12, remember?) No, Herod Agrippa was quite familiar with this Christian movement. He was also the custodian of the Temple Treasure at Jerusalem, and had been granted the right to appoint the high priest. He was extremely interested in what was going on.

5. How does Festus describe Paul in verse 14?

6. How does Festus describe Jesus in verse 19?

Unknowingly, in verse 19, Festus gives the very heart of the Gospel, and the key theme of the Book of Acts -- the Resurrection! In next week's lesson, we will again study the resurrection, and what it means to each one of us. We will also look at some reasons that people today see Jesus like Festus did, "one Jesus, who is dead."

In verse 19, Festus described the Jewish religion as "superstition". (Old King James) Scofield says that this term means a "peculiar demon worship." I'm sure that Festus winced at this description of Judaism. Festus was not choosing his words very carefully, was he?

Festus refers to Caesar as "Augustus" in verse 21. This was a title, not a proper name. The title was first used by Octavianus, Julius Caesar's adopted son and successor, and was adopted by the Caesars that followed.

7. How does Agrippa respond in verse 22?
8. Read Matthew 10:18. What did Jesus tell his disciples would happen to them?
9. Read Matthew 10:19-20. What promise of help did He give?

Although he wasn't there when Jesus spoke to them, I'm sure that Paul knew the words of Jesus. Perhaps Luke told him! I'm sure that knowing the Holy Spirit would show him what to say was comforting. I bet he clung to that.

10. How about you? What, or whom, do you rely on when you get in a tough situation? Do you ask the Holy Spirit to show you what to say, or do you try to reason, debate, and defend in your own strength and wisdom?

As we hide God's Word in our hearts, we can trust that the Holy Spirit will show us what to say when we are called to debate or defend the faith. Let's "**Rejoice**" that the Holy Spirit is as powerful today as He was at the time of Paul. Isn't He good?

Fifth Day

Write out your memory verse. If God used this verse in your life this week, please share it with your class!

Today we will wrap up our lesson with Agrippa and Bernice coming to listen to Paul's case. How scary it must be to think your destiny could be in the hands of these evil people. Praise God that our destiny and our future are in the hands of the Living God!

1. Read Acts 25:23-27.
2. What kind of entrance did Agrippa and Bernice make?

Verse 23 tells us that they entered with all "pomp." This word is "phantasia" in the Greek, which means a "show, or display." We can just imagine the scene. Walking into the audience room in the palace, they probably are adorned with their purple robes of royalty, and the gold crown on their heads. I'm sure Festus was probably wearing his scarlet robe which a governor wore on such occasions. There were probably beautiful tapestries on the walls, carved ceilings and marble pillars. There would have been soldiers standing on guard, dignitaries everywhere. What a scene! And here comes Paul, a Jewish tent-maker, hands in chains. We will see tomorrow who it is that has the power, as Paul begins to speak!

3. Why does Paul say that he is sending Paul to Rome? (vs 25)

Festus is required to send a report with the prisoner when he sends him to another court. He's at a loss as to what to write. Remember what Lysias had written about him? Read Acts 23:26-30.

Paul had been in custody for over two years, had endured five trials, and still had not been charged with any crime. No wonder Festus didn't know what to write!

4. What is Festus saying in verses 26-27? To whom did he hand over the hearing? Why?

We end this chapter anxiously anticipating Paul's speech to this pompous group of people. What will he say? What will they do? Next chapter proves to be an exciting one, and one that encourages us again to be bold in our faith. Let's end with a few questions:

5. What did you learn from Festus this week? (good or bad)

6. What did you learn from Paul this week?

7. What did *God* show you personally this week, through the lesson, the memory verse, or your own devotion time?

8. Write a prayer or a poem to the Lord. Express your thankfulness for His plan for your life and that He is holding your future and destiny in His hands!

**Have a great week! Look for many "Reasons to Rejoice"
as you go through your day.**